

To Understand Buddhism

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“To Understand Buddhism”

**Excerpts From a Talk by Venerable
Master Chin Kung**

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Chapter One: A Virtuous and Perfect Education

Today, we see an increasing number of people around the world starting to practice Buddhism. However, not many people truly understand what Buddhism is.

Therefore, this becomes a very important topic. What exactly is Buddhism? We need to understand it clearly. Buddhism is a most virtuous and perfect education directed by the **Buddha** towards all **sentient beings** in the **nine realms**. How can we tell that Buddhism is an education? First, we can tell from the way we call Buddha Shakyamuni our “Original Teacher” that he is the founder of Buddhism and that we are his students. From this, it is very apparent that the Buddha and we share a teacher-student relationship. This is only found in education.

If Buddhism is his teaching, who then is the Buddha? Buddha is a **Sanskrit** word meaning wisdom and enlightenment. However, this wisdom is not the worldly wisdom we think of today. Broadly speaking,

the Buddha's wisdom is the ability to ultimately, perfectly and correctly comprehend the true reality of life and the universe in the past, present and future. One who has perceived this wisdom is called a Buddha. Buddha Shakyamuni told us that all sentient beings, including ourselves, possess this innate wisdom and ability. Thus Buddhism regards all beings equally. Although we are equal in origin, presently we cannot see this because everyone's wisdom and abilities differ.

In our society, there are those who are intelligent and those who are not, those with great ability and those with less. How do these things come about? The Buddha told us that they are due to our varying degrees of **delusion**. Our innate wisdom and abilities are temporarily lost due to this delusion, but are not truly or permanently lost. If we can break through this delusion, then we will be able to recover these abilities. Therefore, the Buddha's teachings show us how to rid ourselves of delusion and to uncover our innate abilities.

It is often stated in **Mahayana sutras** that the Buddha did not directly help sentient beings. Then how do sentient beings become Buddhas? By themselves. The Buddha only assists from the side by explaining the true reality of how we delude ourselves. After realizing this, we diligently put his teachings into practice to attain enlightenment of true reality. We

then become Buddhas. Buddha Shakyamuni clearly explained that becoming a Buddha is attainable by all sentient beings.

From this, we can see that Buddhism is a teaching. However, a teacher can only educate us about the principles, tell us of his/her experiences in practice and attainment, and suggest various methods for our attainment. The rest ultimately depends upon us. We are the ones who need to be enthusiastic and diligent in order to attain achievement. Once we understand that Buddhism is an education, we will logically regard the Buddha as our teacher. From this, we understand that in proper **Way Places**, we do not regard the Buddha or **Bodhisattva** images as gods to be worshipped. We make offerings to these images for two reasons. First, to remember and repay our gratitude for this truly great education, which we have so fortunately encountered and accepted in this lifetime.

The opening verse to sutras says it very well; “It is extremely difficult to encounter this teaching in infinite eons.” The debt of gratitude we owe the Buddha is similar to the remembrance, which some Chinese have toward their ancestors. We reflect on our origins for without these ancestors we would not exist. The second reason we make offerings to the Buddha is to follow the examples of the virtuous. Buddha Shakyamuni was an ordinary person like us; yet, he

was able to be awakened and become a Buddha. What is there to stop us from achieving this as well? Therefore, the pictures or statues of the Buddha serve to remind us every moment to advance diligently towards this goal. The images are not to be regarded as gods or objects of superstition.

In Buddhist Way Places, the images of Buddhas and Bodhisattvas have many appearances. This has often led to the misconception that not only is Buddhism a religion but one that worships multi-deities as well. Indeed Buddhas and Bodhisattvas have many names. For example, in the Tripitaka there is the *Ten Thousand-Buddha Names Sutra*, which gives us over twelve thousand Buddha's names and even more names for Bodhisattvas. Why are there so many Buddhas and Bodhisattvas? Within our original-nature there exists infinite wisdom, virtuous and artistic abilities that cannot be completely represented by merely one name. It is similar to a highly accomplished person in a prominent position; his or her business card could have numerous titles.

The names of the Buddhas represent the complete, innate and virtuous abilities within our **self-nature**. All the Bodhisattva names represent cultivation of different **virtues**. The original abilities within our self-nature are infinite, but temporarily lost. Without genuine cultivation, we will not be able to uncover any of them. All the Buddha and Bodhisattva names are

none other than ourselves. Once we understand this, we will realize that a high level of artistry represents the styles of the Buddha's teachings. For example, sculptures and pictures can express the **Dharma**.

Understanding the true meaning of these images will help one to gain the true benefits of the Buddha's teachings.

If Buddhism is not a religion, why is it not then a philosophy? In philosophy, there is both a subject and an object. In Mahayana Buddhism, there is no difference between subject and object; they are one. This meaning is very profound and difficult to understand. For example, a great master said, "Utilizing gold to form utensils, all utensils are of gold." Are the gold and the utensil the same thing or different? From their appearances they look like two different things. However, from their composition we realize that they are the same.

One needs a profound intuitive comprehension to truly understand the reality of life and the universe. All of the Mahayana Sutras try to explain this concept and truth. One will share the same viewpoints with the Buddha when one truly understands and clearly recognizes this truth. Ordinary people, like we are deluded. In what way? Because we see everything in opposition to the other, not knowing that in reality everything is actually one and not two.

Chapter Two: The Goal of the Buddha's Teaching

From the intrinsic nature of Buddhism, we proceed to the goal of the Buddha's teachings. This goal is to break through delusion and achieve enlightenment.

The Buddha pointed out to us why we are leading lives of suffering and why the **six realms** of reincarnation exist. It is so, because the wisdom and virtuous abilities in our original nature have yet to be uncovered. Thus, all our viewpoints and ways of interacting with life and the universe are incorrect. The erroneous acts committed due to these incorrect viewpoints and ways have resulted in the suffering of reincarnation within the six realms.

The goal of the Buddha's teachings is to help and guide us to break through our delusion, to be awakened and escape this suffering and to obtain happiness. What do we seek in Buddhism? We seek Annuttara-Samyak-Sambodhi, the Perfect Complete Enlightenment. The Buddha teaches and hopes that all of us will attain this ultimate enlightenment, in other words, will become a Buddha.

The Perfect Complete Enlightenment can be explained as three levels: **Arhats**, Bodhisattvas and Buddhas. The first is “*Proper Enlightenment.*” In our world, there are some very intelligent and wise people, such as scientists, philosophers and religious leaders. They have reached higher realization than most people have. However, although they may have reached a certain level of realization, the Buddha would not recognize their knowledge as the proper enlightenment, because they have not severed their **afflictions**. They still dwell on the rights and wrongs of others, on greed, anger, ignorance and arrogance. They still harbor wandering, discriminatory thoughts and **attachments**. In other words, their minds are not pure. Without the **pure mind**, no matter how high the level of realization one reaches, it is still not the proper enlightenment.

In Buddhism, the standard for proper enlightenment is the pure mind from which wisdom arises. It is the wish of all Buddhas that we attain this proper enlightenment. This is the level or degree of an Arhat and is similar to attending a university to earn an undergraduate degree. Therefore, Arhat, Bodhisattva and Buddha are titles similar to degrees of enlightenment attained in Buddhism. Those who achieve proper enlightenment are called Arhats. Arhats do not have illusory or misleading thoughts and viewpoints. They do not dwell on the rights and wrongs of others, or on thoughts of greed, anger, ignorance or arrogance.

From this, we can comprehend intuitively the difference between Buddhism and worldly education. From the Buddha, we learn the true teachings and proper enlightenment. Only with this proper enlightenment can one escape all sufferings to obtain true happiness. As human beings, we undergo the sufferings of birth, old age, sickness and death. We do not attain what we seek, are parted with our loved ones and find ourselves in the presence of those whom we resent or even hate. We are surrounded by all these sufferings with no apparent way of being truly free. Only after learning Buddhism will we be able to reach genuine liberation.

The *Flower Adornment Sutra* explains to us, “All sentient beings possess the same wisdom and virtuous capabilities as the Buddha, but these qualities are unattainable due to wandering thoughts and attachments.” This clearly explains the root cause of our problems. Practicing Buddhism is to accord with the teachings of the Buddha, to rid us of wandering, discriminating thoughts and attachments. Thus, we uncover our pure mind, in turn giving rise to true wisdom, which is proper enlightenment. Therefore, Buddhas and Bodhisattvas would not recognize the intelligent and worldly wisdom, as it lacks the pure mind, the proper enlightenment. Upon attaining proper enlightenment, one has the ability to transcend the endless cycles of birth and death, not to mention the ability to solve everyday problems.

Whether talking about the Buddha's education or worldly education, it is essential to understand the concept of delving deeply into one method in order to attain achievement. This is especially so in Buddhism. One who truly wishes to learn effectively needs to follow only one teacher and practice only one path to ensure a smooth journey. When following two teachers with two different paths, one is bound to become confused as to which path to take. Even worse, following three teachers catches one at a T street. With four teachers one is caught at a cross street. Today's young people like to learn a lot, but fail to attain a good result. The problem lies with being caught at those cross streets, confused as to which way to take. For one to succeed and attain achievement in practicing Buddhism, one needs to follow just one teacher and concentrate on just one method.

What is this achievement? True achievement is attaining a pure mind. Upon achieving some degree of pure mind, one will have fewer afflictions and thus an increase in true wisdom, enabling one to solve problems in this world and beyond. Without this true wisdom, there is no way to truly solve problems. Therefore, true wisdom is essential in leading a happy and fulfilling life. On a broader scale, it can help us to solve society's problems.

Today there are many intelligent politicians who thought they were very smart but have ended up

bringing their countries to the brink of disaster, as well as putting their citizens through much misery. What is the reason for this? These leaders have not severed their afflictions, discriminating and wandering thoughts, and attachments. Consequently, their first consideration is their own benefit, their self-attachment.

The Buddha taught us to attain true wisdom by first breaking free of our own viewpoints. Without this wisdom, one could misinterpret the meanings within the Mahayana sutras. If one is able to part from the selfish mind, then true benefits will definitely be received. With proper enlightenment, only when one has no ego or self-attachment, will one be able to differentiate true from false, proper from deviated, right from wrong and beneficial from harmful.

Without breaking through one's own viewpoints, one will not have these abilities. From this, we understand there is a standard to the proper enlightenment.

One level above the proper enlightenment is the “*Equal and Proper Enlightenment*.” Equal means equal to the Buddha, but not yet having become a Buddha. This level is higher than that of an Arhat. The equal and proper enlightenment requires one to break through one degree of ignorance, to attain one degree of Dharma body. At this point, the way one views the reality of life and the universe is very close to that of

the Buddhas. One who achieves the equal and proper enlightenment would be called a Bodhisattva.

The *Flower Adornment Sutra* explains the forty-one levels of Bodhisattvas, all of which have these levels of enlightenment. After breaking through the very last degree of ignorance, perfecting wisdom and enlightenment, one achieves the “*Perfect, Complete Enlightenment*” that is Buddhahood. Therefore, Buddha, Bodhisattva and Arhat are common titles, not a specific name for a specific person. They are titles similar to those of Doctorate, Master or Graduate degrees. For example, in the name Guan Yin Bodhisattva, Guan Yin represents great compassion and kindness. The title of Bodhisattva is similar to a Masters Degree. Presently, people have misconceptions about Buddhas and Bodhisattvas, thinking these names are specific beings. They do not understand that these titles refer to any being who possesses those characteristics. Buddha or Bodhisattva, when added to a name is simply referring to a specialty.

From the intrinsic nature of Buddhism, we realize that our purpose of practice is to seek wisdom. In Zen, this goal is called, “In pursuit of clarity of mind to see into one’s self-nature.” In other words “Complete Enlightenment.” In the **Pure Land** School, this is called “One Mind Undisturbed.” The Pure Land School is unique in that not only does one seek to have One

Mind Undisturbed but also seeks birth into the **Western Pure Land**. This is unlike other schools, which rely on one's own strength of cultivation in seeking solely one goal. The Pure Land method has two goals that can be achieved in one lifetime.

One who is very familiar with the *Infinite Life Sutra* and understood its teachings would be free of doubt. The full title of this sutra reveals the goals of our practice: *The Buddha Speaks of the Infinite Life Sutra of Adornment, Purity, Equality and Enlightenment of the Mahayana School*. Infinite life and adornment are what Pure Land practitioners seek. *Infinite life* refers to the **merits** and virtues of one's perfect self-nature. *Adornment* refers to perfect complete wisdom with great ease and fulfillment. *Purity, equality* and *enlightenment* are the methods, the three ways of practice. Upon attaining any one, all three are attained. Of all the schools of Buddhism, none surpass these three ways of practice.

The Zen School uses the awakening path to reach the great enlightenment and attain the clarity to see into one's true nature. Buddhist schools other than Zen stress the practice of understanding or proper viewpoints, until reaching great complete understanding. The Pure Land School, on the other hand, concentrates on the pure mind. A person with purity of mind will naturally be non-discriminating and awakened. An awakened person will naturally

have a pure and non-discriminating mind. The route chosen may be different but all reach the same goal. In Zen practice it is expressed as “obtaining clarity of mind and seeing into one’s true nature.”

Different schools may use different names but the results or the level of the state of mind are the same. Therefore, to criticize any other schools would be to slander both the Buddha and the Dharma. All these methods were passed down to us from Buddha Shakyamuni. Choosing any path will enable one to attain achievement. How can we say that one method is better than another? From all these different methods we just need to know how to choose the one method that is most suitable for us and our level.

First, if the level of the method we chose were beyond us, making it difficult to practice, we would not succeed easily with that method. Second, it needs to be suitable and convenient for our manner of living. Third, it needs to be compatible with modern society, because we cannot separate ourselves from society or other human beings. Therefore, we need to consider these factors to choose our method of cultivation.

However, no matter which method one practices, it is essential to be rid of self-viewpoint and attachment in order to obtain the benefits from practice. Or else, like so many have experienced, the great efforts put into the practice will have been in vain. Some practitioners

have felt that even after years of practice they have achieved virtually nothing, even to the point of feeling that they were better off before they practiced. It seemed as if the more they practiced, the worse they felt. All this comes from having chosen a method that was unsuitable for them. This is similar to choosing an unsuitable major in school. When one chooses a major that is not suited to one's foundation and ability, one has an extremely difficult time trying to succeed. Choosing the right major makes studying much easier, so one will have a much better chance of success. The same thing goes for practicing Buddhism. If one does not know one's own capacity, one can test oneself.

Like myself, for example. After reading many Mahayana sutras, I thought myself incapable of any achievement. I wanted very much to sever my wandering, discriminating thoughts and attachments, but was unable to. Finally, I chose the Pure Land method to attain achievement. It does not require one to be completely rid of but rather to suppress these hindrances. As long as one is able to suppress all afflictions, one can still be born into the Western Pure Land carrying over one's existing karma.

This method suits me very well and thus is how I chose it. Previously, I had tried Zen, the Teaching Schools, the Esoteric School and the practice of following the precepts, but could not reach achievement with them. Thus, I came back to the Pure

Land method and wholeheartedly delved deeply into the Buddha Name Chanting Method while concentrating solely on lecturing on the Pure Land sutras. These are my experiences from decades of practice.



Chapter Three: Symbolism and the Arts

After we understand clearly the goal of the Buddha's teachings, we will view the sutras differently. These sutras are one of the world's largest literary collections. I believe that when considering the range of all academia, none of them surpass Buddhism. To obtain the benefits from this vast collection, it is necessary for us to know and understand the essence of its content, which is the true reality of all Dharma, the true reality of life and the universe. Life refers to ourselves. Universe refers to the living environment that surrounds us. It would be incorrect to treat Buddhism as an abstract and obscure learning that had nothing to do with our daily lives. Every word in the sutra closely relates to our daily living. Furthermore, it is definitely not superstition.

How and where do we start? For convenience, the perfection in the methods of the Buddha's teaching, uses a high level of creativity. Buddhism of two thousand years ago had already taken an artistic path. For example, all the Buddha's names and sculptures represent our virtuous nature, innate qualities of wisdom, virtuous abilities and artistic talents. All of the Bodhisattva's names and forms represent our cultivation of virtue. They instruct us how to apply the teachings in our daily lives to bring out our virtuous nature so that we may receive Buddhism's benefits.

In Chinese Mahayana Buddhism, four great Bodhisattvas represent our order of practice and level of achievement. The first is Earth Store Bodhisattva. Whether we are thinking of worldly teachings, the dharma or Buddhism; nothing can be accomplished without the earth or a place of existence. The existence of humans cannot be separated from our great earth as we rely upon it for survival. Whether clothing, food, living or working, all rely on the production of the land, thus the infinite treasures that the great earth encompasses are seemingly endless for us to use. The word “earth” in the name Earth Store Bodhisattva represents the mind and the word “store” means treasure.

The Buddha’s teachings guide us to first start the practice from our mind, as our true nature encompasses the infinite wisdom and virtuous abilities that are no different from those of Buddhas or Bodhisattvas. However, today it seems as if we have lost our innate wisdom and virtuous abilities. The Buddha told us that all these qualities are not truly lost, just not yet uncovered. In the present moment, we endlessly immerse ourselves in wandering, discriminating thoughts and attachments, which have resulted in this temporary loss of abilities. However, inside the true mind, no wandering thoughts exist. If a mind has wandering thoughts then that mind is a false one. We originally possessed this true mind, so practicing Buddhism is simply recovering it.

Therefore, our first goal in practice is to uncover and look for the treasure in our mind. In other words, the Buddha's teachings do not seek from the outside but rather they seek from within our self-nature.

Earth Store Bodhisattva represents filial piety; thus, the *Earth Store Sutra* is about filial piety, a basic concept that everyone would do well to start from. The kindness that our parents have shown by giving us life and nurturing us is beyond description. To be filial and take care of our parents is naturally our basic responsibility. Not only do we need to take care of their material needs but of their spiritual life as well. Moreover, we need to nurture their aspirations for us and for us, this is the hardest of all. Parents wish their children to have successful careers, behave well, and to be respected by current and future generations. In other words, we would do well to act in a manner, which will make them proud of us. Therefore, the ultimate and perfect achievement of filial piety is to become Buddha. We begin our practice from here and expand our filial piety and respect to include all sentient beings.

The second Bodhisattva, Guan Yin, represents the cultivation of great compassion and kindness. What is the meaning of making offerings to Guan Yin Bodhisattva? It is to remind us that we would do well to treat all people with great compassion and kindness,

to use unconditional love and care to help all sentient beings.

The third Bodhisattva, Manjusri, represents wisdom and rationale, reminding us that when we practice and interact with others we need to fulfill our filial duty, to rely upon wisdom and rationale, not on emotion. The fourth Bodhisattva, the Great Samantabhadra (Universal Worthy) represents carrying out the cultivation truthfully, applying filial piety, compassion, kindness and rationale in our daily lives. When one perfectly achieves the way of Universal Worthy Bodhisattva, one becomes a Buddha. Buddhism teaches us how to live in harmony with the true reality of life and the universe. In other words, we would live perfect and wonderful lives similar to those of Buddhas and Bodhisattvas. This is the true, ultimate and perfect Mahayana teaching.

To practice Buddhism, we start by:

- 1) Being filial and respectful toward parents, teachers and elders,
- 2) Having the great compassionate mind,
- 3) Nurturing one's thinking and wisdom and
- 4) Broadening one's mind.

Although in sequence, they also can be practiced simultaneously, as each encompasses the others. For example, being filial to parents includes compassion and kindness, reasoning and wisdom. Wisdom includes being filial, compassionate and kind.

Once we have a general understanding of Buddhism, how do we apply it to our daily living? First we need to know what each Buddha and Bodhisattva represents. If we do not, then Buddhism would be reduced to superstition and we would not receive its true benefits. All Buddhist sutras contain these qualities, characteristics and the ways of practice; therefore, learning only one sutra will be enough. One needs to know how to understand and apply the teachings effectively.

Usually in the center of the main hall of a way place, there are statues of one Buddha and two Bodhisattvas, which represent our self-nature and original entity. The two Bodhisattvas represent our virtuous abilities within our self-nature; one is understanding and the other is practice. If the Buddha in the middle is Buddha Shakyamuni, then the two figures on either side of him will be Manjusri and Universal Worthy Bodhisattvas, representing wisdom and application respectively. Thus, understanding and practice are combined into one. If the hall has the three sages of the Western Pure Land, with Buddha **Amitabha** in the middle, representing self-nature, then the two figures

on either side of him will be Guan Yin and Great Strength Bodhisattvas. They respectively represent compassion and wisdom, completely symbolizing the infinite wisdom and virtuous capabilities. Therefore, we again see that Buddhism is a teaching.

There are profound teachings within the names of the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas, for example the name of Buddha Shakyamuni tells us the principles of the Buddha's education. "Shakya" means humanity and kindness. "Muni" means purity of mind. The teaching of these two qualities is advocated because people in our world lack compassion and kindness, and are often selfish. Moreover, all sentient beings lack purity of mind, constantly dwelling in wandering thoughts, greed, anger, ignorance and arrogance. Any Bodhisattva who becomes a Buddha in this world will be named Shakyamuni to teach us the remedy for our problems. Once the representations of Buddha and Bodhisattva statues are understood intuitively just by looking at them, one will perfectly comprehend the goal of the Buddha's teachings.

When we enter the first hall of a way place, the Hall of Heavenly Guardians, we will see the statue of Maitreya Bodhisattva surrounded by the four Heavenly Guardians in the middle of the hall. Maitreya Bodhisattva, known in the west as the Happy Buddha, has a huge smile representing joyfulness. His great stomach represents enormous tolerance and

broad-mindedness, teaching us to interact with others and matters with joy, to be non-discriminating and tolerant. Next to him are four Heavenly Guardians or Dharma Protectors who teach us how to protect ourselves.

The Eastern Dharma Protector, symbolizes fulfilling one's duty and responsibility, teaching us that regardless of position, one needs to fulfill one's duties. He is holding a lute in his hand. The strings of the instrument should not be too tight, or else they will break; nor should they be too loose or they will not play well. When properly adjusted and balanced, the instrument will play beautifully, clearly symbolizing that we need to take the middle path when interacting with matters, people and objects. When each of us fulfills our responsibilities and obligations, how could the nation not prosper?

The Southern Dharma Protector symbolizes improvement and daily advancement. Not only do matters need to be taken care of appropriately; continuous improvement also needs to be sought. In his right hand, the Southern Dharma Protector holds the sword of wisdom and in his left hand a ring symbolizing the perfection of wisdom, showing us that one needs to use wisdom in seeking improvement. The sword symbolizes how one needs to sever afflictions before they are out of control.

The third and fourth Heavenly Guardians are the Western and the Northern Dharma Protectors, representing comprehensive vision and listening respectively. Both teach us to observe and listen more carefully as well as to read numerous books and travel to many places for comprehensive learning. They teach us to do well in our job, to adopt the good qualities as well as to disregard the shortcomings of others.

The Western Dharma Protector represents far-sighted observation and holds a dragon or snake. The dragon or snake symbolizes constant change. In his other hand, he holds a bead, symbolizing principles. People, matters and objects in society undergo changes constantly. One needs to observe very carefully and thoroughly, to have a firm grasp on the principles within in order to be able to control this “dragon or snake.” The Northern Dharma Protector holds an umbrella to prevent one from being contaminated. This reminds us that within a complex society, one needs to know how to protect one’s body and mind from pollution and corruption. From these examples, we can see that the artistic aspects of the Buddha’s education are truly beautiful. Unfortunately, many people regard these Dharma protectors as gods to be worshipped, which is totally wrong.

Chapter Four:

The Five Guidelines of Practice

The Three Conditions

After establishing Pure Land Learning Centers in several countries, we set five guidelines for Pure Land practitioners to follow. These **five guidelines** were extracted from the five Pure Land sutras to be applied in daily living. The first guideline is the **Three Conditions**, extracted from the *Visualization Sutra*, which provides a very important foundation for cultivation. The Buddha stated in the sutra that these Three Conditions are the proper causes of which all the Buddhas from the past, present and future practice their pure karma. In other words, all the people who became Buddhas perfected these as their foundation; thus, we cannot disregard them.

The First Condition concerns the **good fortune** of heavenly beings and humans. Before one can become a Buddha or a Bodhisattva, one needs to first become a good person. The criteria for this are:

- a) Being filial and respectful toward parents, teachers, and elders,
- b) Being compassionate and not killing any living being and
- c) Practicing the **Ten Good Conducts**.

With this first step, we begin to practice Buddhism.

The Second Condition includes:

- a) Taking the **Three Refuges**,
- b) Abiding by laws, customs, and precepts and
- c) Conducting oneself in proper and dignified manner.

The main principle of our practice is awakening, proper thoughts and viewpoints, and purity. A beginning step in learning Buddhism is to Take Refuge in the Triple Jewels. After one generates the heart to Take Refuge in the Triple Jewels by accepting, learning and practicing Buddhism, one finds a Dharma Master to pass on the principle, goal and direction of practicing Buddhism. The Triple Jewels are the Buddha, the Dharma and the **Sangha**. In appearance, they are pictures or sculptures of Buddhas, Buddhist sutras, and monks and nuns, respectively. Another way of understanding them is that they are the true Triple Jewels within our true mind.

The Buddha taught us to take refuge in the Triple Jewels of our self-nature. To return and rely upon the Buddha is to rely on the awakening in our self-nature. What is this awakening? Currently, we are deluded and not awakened. How did we become deluded?

Delusion is due to our discriminating mind and attachments. If we part from this discriminating mind and attachments, can we still see objects clearly? We cannot say we do not see them, but if we see them very clearly without discriminating thoughts and attachments, then we are awakened. When there is the slightest discrimination or attachment, one is deluded.

The same applies to our attaching to the form we are looking at; it is delusion. Initially, objects do not have names but are given them by people. The names, like the object, are not real. Apart from the names and appearances, what we see is the true form. We are deluded about these forms, their physical features and their names. Consequently, when we rid ourselves of these delusions, we will not be attached. This is how we can train ourselves to return and rely upon the Buddha Jewel or Enlightenment.

If someone points to a table and asks what it is, we will naturally say it is a table because that is what everybody calls it. We go along with everybody's attachment but if we are not attached to it ourselves, then we will be awakened. Therefore, the minds of the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas are pure and without the slightest pollution for they are completely without these attachments. When with others, we can go along with them but maintain our purity inside. In this way, we return and rely upon awakening. After taking refuge, when we apply this concept to our daily living,

whether interacting with people, matters or objects, we will no longer be deluded. Our mind will always be pure, non-discriminating and able to help all sentient beings. This is to return and rely upon awakening or the Buddha Jewel.

The Dharma that we return to and rely upon refers to proper thoughts and viewpoints, which is hard to accomplish. Only when we are truly enlightened, will our thoughts and viewpoints be correct. Before we reach enlightenment, we can adopt the proper thoughts and viewpoints of Buddha Shakyamuni as ours. All the thoughts and viewpoints within the sutras are correct. We can at first rely on Buddha Shakyamuni, but only for a while, as he does not want us to rely upon him forever. This is like a student relying on teachers in school but becoming independent after graduation. Likewise, before we attain great enlightenment, we need to rely on Buddha Shakyamuni and Buddha Amitabha as our teachers.

Where is the Buddha? The Buddha is within the sutras, as Buddha Shakyamuni stated in the *Infinite Life Sutra* and Buddha Amitabha relayed to us through the Forty-eight Great Vows. Relying on the teachings within the sutra is relying on the Buddha. We would do well to practice earnestly what the Buddha taught us to do or refrain from doing. In this way we will be true and good students. Applying this concept in our daily living is to return and rely upon the Dharma Jewel.

The Sangha of the Sangha Jewel represents purity and harmony as in the **Six Principles of Harmony**.

Consequently, whenever we see a monk and nun, we do not want to dwell on whether this person is a great cultivator or a violator of precepts. Whether they are or are not is not our concern. Seeing a monk or a nun reminds us to see whether we ourselves have lived by the Six Principles of Harmony, or have cultivated purity of mind. To truly take refuge is to know how to reflect on ourselves, since we still have all the same bad habits and are committing the same offenses, having been deluded for infinite eons.

It would be helpful for Buddhists to set up the Triple Jewels in their home. When we make offerings to the Buddha statue or picture, we will be reminded that we need to be awakened. How? When our **six senses** encounter the external environment, we would not discriminate or attach, or give rise to any thoughts. For example, meditation is not giving rise to any discriminating thoughts or attachments. Thus one achieves a high level of wisdom and is able to see all situations clearly. However, ordinary people like us, use the false mind and constantly give rise to wandering and discriminating thoughts and attachments in these situations. The appearance of everything we see is false. Once we have understood these principles and learned how to not have wandering thoughts and attachments, we can also become a Bodhisattva or Buddha.

Taking the Three Refuges is a beginning step in practicing Buddhism. From there, we proceed on to the foundation of Theravada Buddhism then to Mahayana Buddhism for the Third Condition, which is comprised of:

- a) Generating the Bodhi mind,
- b) Deeply believing in the Law of Cause and Effect,
- c) Reciting and upholding Mahayana sutras and
- d) Encouraging others on the path to Enlightenment.

Before practicing Mahayana Buddhism, we need to generate the Bodhi mind. Bodhi means awakening, thus, the Bodhi mind is an awakened mind. How will one be awakened? When one first realizes and understands that this world is full of sufferings.

Upon careful and rational observation of society, we may find our conclusions frightening. Looking back over the last thirty years, we see that people used to be kinder and more considerate. Whereas, people nowadays are more selfish and usually only think of benefiting oneself at the expense of others. This selfishness has created a chaotic world making even the climate abnormal. Therefore, the first thing in

generating the Bodhi mind is to realize that this world is filled with suffering and that the Western Pure Land is filled with bliss. True awakening is when one seeks to escape these sufferings then to attain happiness.

Second, awakening is the aspiration to benefit and help all sentient beings, to think of others and not of oneself. What are the urgent needs of sentient beings? There is nothing more important than the Buddha's teachings. Thus, our most pressing need is nurturing and training lecturers to continue to pass on Buddhism. Today due to our advanced printing skills, numerous sutras have been distributed throughout the world, but regrettably, few people lecture on them. Since people have the tendency to misunderstand the meanings within the sutras, we need qualified people to lecture and explain them. Today the best way to benefit others is to train lecturers and at the same time gain innumerable merits. We work toward this goal with a great tolerant mind, not just for one Way Place, area or country but for the whole world. If only one country prospers and the others are poor, the poor will envy and resent the prosperous, leading to conflicts or worse. How could one pass the days peacefully knowing this? If everyone is prosperous, then all will be happy and peaceful.

Once there is a good number of lecturers to help others clearly understand the principles of the Buddha's teachings, they will in turn gradually help others in

reaching awakening to break through delusion and escape suffering thus attaining happiness. This is the most beneficial way for one to put the Bodhi mind into practice.

To believe deeply in the Law of Cause and Effect does not simply refer to “What goes around comes around.” The profound meaning is, “Being mindful of Buddha Amitabha is the cause and becoming Buddha is the consequence.”

For the Pure Land practitioner, reciting and upholding Mahayana Sutras can be accomplished by reciting the *Infinite Life Sutra*. Delving deeply into one method can be achieved by concentrating on one sutra. If one does not think this is sufficient, the four other sutras and one commentary of the Pure Land School could also be recited. These six are more than enough.

Simply allow them to take root and flourish. Finally, one encourages others on the path to enlightenment. The first three parts of the Third Condition benefit the self. The last one teaches us to dedicate the benefits we have received to all others; to help them to understand, practice and succeed in their cultivation of Buddhism. When attaining achievement in the Buddha’s teachings, one succeeds in attaining infinite wisdom.

The Six Harmonies

The Three Conditions are the first of The Five Guidelines of the foundation for Pure Land practice. We have yet to become Buddhas or to depart from this world. Even when one becomes a Buddha, one does not leave all behind as Buddhas want to help all sentient beings in the **ten directions**.

How does one get along with others harmoniously? The Buddha set six principles for us to follow. Not only are these applicable within a Buddhist community but also in all organizations or groups. When we take refuge in the Triple Jewels, there is a saying, “To return and rely upon the Sangha, the most worthy of respect of all groups.” Group means a gathering of people. In our society, the smallest group of people is a family, a larger one is a nation and the largest is the union of many nations. Actually, the whole world is a group of which we all are a part. Why is a Buddhist community the most precious of all groups? The six rules that the Buddha set for Buddhist communities are something all its members follow, making this group the most worthy of respect and of being a role model for all.

The first of the Six Principles of Harmony is to share the same goals and viewpoints, in other words to establish a common consensus. Everyone within this group shares similar thoughts and viewpoints,

providing the foundation for living in harmony. If everyone has different viewpoints and ideas, then conflicts would be unavoidable, making the group discordant. Therefore, sharing the same goals and viewpoints is very important, making this the first of the Six Principles.

The second of the Principles is to observe the same precepts and rules. There are both broad and narrow meanings within the word “Precept.” The narrow meaning includes upholding the five or ten layperson precepts, monk’s or nun’s precepts, or Bodhisattva precepts and the Buddha’s teachings. In a broader sense, “Observing precepts” includes abiding by etiquette, customs, rules and laws of the entire world.

Today, through the advancement of technology in travel and communication, our sphere of activity is not limited to our country but expands to other countries as well. Whether sightseeing, on business, or visiting others, it is essential to observe the local customs and laws, to live in harmony, thus being welcomed and respected by others. This principle is practical and brings joy to others; therefore, upholding Buddhist precepts also includes following the customs and laws of the country. All governments welcome law-abiding citizens, so to truly promote and be a benefactor of Buddhism is to uphold the precepts. With this as a base, people could then harmoniously live without arguments and share the joy of practicing together.

When living together and sharing a common consensus, a group would naturally not have any conflicts. To practice with the same goal and to achieve improvement daily would ensure that the community would experience joy and inner peace.

The last of the Six Principles is to share benefits equally. Benefits refer to our daily necessities. A Sangha does not merely represent a community of monks and nuns. At home, the family can also practice Buddhism and accord with the Six Principles of Harmony to make up a sangha. Even within a company, everyone, from the employer to the workers, can practice Buddhism to make up a sangha.

Therefore, sangha has a very broad meaning. Within a Sangha, one strives to share benefits. For left-home people it means having the same manner of living, from the abbot to one with no formal responsibilities within the community, everyone shares the same manner of living, with no special treatment. We would do well to live by the Six Principles of Harmony to learn how to better get along with others. When with other organizations or groups, regardless of whether or not they follow the Six Principles of Harmony, we ourselves need to accord with the spirit of these Principles to truly follow the Buddha's teachings.

Buddhas and Bodhisattvas are our best role models while we are to be good role models for others who are not Buddhists. This is the spirit of Buddhism, using

our own behavior to influence and benefit others, thus promoting Buddhism. We do not teach others in the formal sense but simply let them observe us. Thus our daily conduct and practice can unobtrusively and imperceptibly help to influence and change others like Buddhas or Bodhisattvas manifesting in this world to teach sentient beings.

The Three Learnings

The third guideline is the **Three Learnings**: self-discipline, concentration and wisdom. The Three Learnings summarize all the teachings from Buddha Shakyamuni and all the Buddhas in the past, present and future. The Great Canon of Sutras is divided into three sections: sutras, vinaya or precepts, and **sastras** or commentaries. Sutras include the teachings of meditation, vinaya includes the teachings of self-discipline or precepts, sastra includes the teachings of wisdom. These Three Learnings of self-discipline, concentration and meditation represent the core of the Buddha's teachings.

The teachings of precepts place most emphasis on rules, regulations and laws. The earth has four seasonal changes: spring, summer, autumn and winter. We need rules and laws to successfully interact with people and matters, thus enabling the members of society to enjoy a wonderful and fulfilling life. A

world absent of law and order is a world of chaos. Although one may possess good fortune and wealth, one may still be unhappy, living in fear and insecurity. Why? We have discarded law and order. The precepts thoroughly explain the principles, methods and the level of mind we need to bring about law and order. The Three Learnings clearly explain this concept. We practice the Buddha's teachings in order to attain the ultimate, perfect wisdom. Once we uncover this inner wisdom, we will know the true reality of life and the universe, including how to restore our original abilities.

The Buddha told us that all sentient beings possess a Buddha's wisdom and virtuous abilities. While the knowledge of the past, present and future is part of our original ability, they are unfortunately covered and hidden by our delusion. Delusion occurs when the mind/heart is not still, while an enlightened one remains unaffected. When our six senses encounter the environment, our mind/heart moves, giving rise to wandering thoughts.

The Buddha taught numerous ways to practice so we can remain unaffected in all situations, not giving rise to any wandering, discriminating thoughts or attachments, thus recovering our original capabilities. This state of mind is deep concentration. Cultivation is correcting one's erroneous thoughts, speech and behavior. What are the standards for these? They are

discipline and concentration. Discipline is the external standard and precept observation is the internal standard; concentration is the standard for the pure mind. The external standard is very important, but much more important is the internal standard, because it helps us to achieve our goal in the practice to attain wisdom.

With self-discipline, we attain the concentration that gives rise to wisdom. This ultimate, perfect wisdom is “Anuttara-Samyak-Sambodhi.” How does one first attain proper realization, then equal and proper realization, and finally perfect, complete realization? These levels of attainment depend on the strength of concentration, the extent of the purity of mind. As Buddhists, the goal of our practice is Perfect, Complete Enlightenment. If one departs from rules of order and purity of mind, one is not practicing Buddhism. No matter which method one practices, whether Buddha Name Chanting, precept observing, mantra chanting, or Zen meditation; if one does not follow the guidelines, one cannot attain the pure mind. All would be just window dressing. With one degree of pure mind, we attain one degree of wisdom. With two degrees of pure mind, we attain two degrees of wisdom, etc. Therefore, practicing accordingly and maintaining and protecting the pure mind, which gives rise to true wisdom, is exceptionally important.

The Six Paramitas or Principles

The fourth guideline is the **Six Principles or Paramitas** that are the primary living principles of Bodhisattvas. Each principle encompasses our whole way of living; for example, the first of the Six Principles is “Giving.” Some people think of giving as simply donating money. Actually, this is only one of the infinite kinds of giving. From the appearance, giving is sacrificing oneself to give to others. However, from its intrinsic nature, giving is letting go.

We can practice giving of our wealth or physical strength. For example, a homemaker keeps house daily providing a comfortable environment for the family. Without proper understanding, this homemaker may feel these daily chores are repetitive; that washing clothes and cooking meals are boring. If however, the homemaker clearly understands that he or she is cultivating the Bodhisattva Way by practicing the Six Principles, then he or she will be filled with joy. Changing one’s perception of doing the same chores with a giving, non-attaching heart is practicing the principle of giving. Not only does one serve the whole family by keeping the house neat, but one also serves as a role model for all relatives and neighbors. In this way, not just one but all beings benefit. One is thus a family role model for all families. Whether managing

a store or business, being a role model for others is practicing the Bodhisattva Way in guiding sentient beings. The principle of giving can be expanded to the infinite universe and beyond. With this extensive broadmindedness, one is a Mahayana Bodhisattva.

Giving is comprised of three categories: wealth, teaching and fearlessness. The giving of wealth includes internal and external wealth. Internal wealth involves all of our mental and physical labors that benefit others. External wealth is the giving of all other things, e.g. money, food, etc. Gaining wealth is the result of giving wealth. The giving of teaching is the willingness to instruct others while not selfishly holding back any knowledge. It is to do one's best in educating willing students. As a result, one gains intelligence and wisdom. The giving of fearlessness includes soothing away other's fears and providing a feeling of security. As a result, one gains health and long life. Most people wish for wealth, intelligence, wisdom, health and long life. When there is a good cause, a good reward will follow. One does not receive a reward without first planting the good cause. By practicing all three kinds of giving, one perfectly attains all these rewards.

Observing carefully, we will see that there are not many who have all they wish for. Some wealthy employers do not possess great intelligence or wisdom, but have intelligent and wise employees

working under them, following their instructions. These intelligent and wise employees have cultivated wisdom in their past lives but did not cultivate good fortune. On the other hand, these employers cultivated good fortune but did not cultivate wisdom. Cause and effect may be complex, but not hard to distinguish. Thus, using Buddhist principles to observe society enables one to know how to conduct oneself in the future.

In reality, true wisdom is more important than good fortune. Wealth is good fortune, but how one uses and allocates wealth requires a high level of wisdom.

Without wisdom, possessing wealth may lead one to create infinite bad karma from bad deeds, thinking one is doing good. Without wisdom, one is unable to distinguish true from false, proper from deviated, right from wrong or beneficial from harmful. Often one is ignorant of having conducted oneself in an erroneous manner.

All these principles are explained very clearly in *Liao Fan's Four Lessons*. Within good and bad there exists true and false, half and full, right and wrong. From its appearance, what may appear to be a true good deed, due to changes in its nature some time later, can turn out to have been a bad one. On the other hand, what may initially appear to be a bad deed can turn out to have been a good one. Therefore, one needs insight to understand the outcome of all good and bad deeds and

not to judge them by their initial appearance. One needs a high level of wisdom to understand deeply and to be far-sighted enough to distinguish correctly the truth.

The second principle is “Precept Observation,” which also has a broad meaning. One follows the Buddha’s teachings, accords with the customs of society, and abides by the rules and laws of a country. In both the spirit of the law as well as the letter, all rules and laws need to be followed.

The third principle is “Patience.” Patience includes long-term patience whether interacting with people, matters or objects. As the Buddha explained in the *Diamond Sutra*, all dharma is attained from patience and endurance. To succeed in either worldly or spiritual dharma, one must have patience. Without it one cannot attain achievement. Having this patience to endure what others cannot, one achieves what others cannot. Only then will one accomplish great deeds.

The fourth principle is “Diligence.” Diligence is seeking focused improvement daily, not trying to advance in many different directions. Advancing with diligence to a certain level, one attains concentration. This concentration does not simply mean cultivating while sitting in a lotus position facing a wall. It is to have a firm hold of one’s mind and not to be influenced by external conditions. This accords with

the *Diamond Sutra*, to remain unmoved by and unattached to any phenomenon. Not attaching to any phenomenon is to not be enticed by temptations from external influences. One achieves concentration when one is unmoved by all **phenomena**, such as the advancement of scientific technology, so confusing yet dazzling to our eyes. It is seeing everything clearly and knowing that all is intuitive wisdom, the prajna wisdom. In this way, one will then live happily.

For example, when we buy a refrigerator, use and maintain it nicely, it can last at least ten years. During these ten years, there will be improvements and changes in refrigerator manufacturing. Will we want to exchange it for a new one? When there is no need for a new one and we continue to use it, we have concentration. When we are moved upon seeing a new model in the store and want to buy it to replace the old one, afraid that guests will laugh at the latter's appearance; we have neither concentration nor wisdom. Living in this way, one would not be happy because one's income would slip through one's fingers just trying to keep up with new products. Buddhism calls this Mara, what comes to make one suffer, in this case, to tempt one to spend all their hard-earned money. A truly wise person would be unmoved and live a happy fulfilling life without worries or afflictions, unlike ordinary people.

The Ten Great Vows of Universal Worthy Bodhisattva

The fifth and last of the guidelines is the **Ten Great Vows of Universal Worthy Bodhisattva**. Universal Worthy Bodhisattva is unlike any other Bodhisattva due to his great broadmindedness, where his every thought is of helping all sentient beings. He does not think of himself, his family, country or world but of the infinite universe and beyond, reaching true perfection. With this great broad mind, all that he practices is great.

The order in practicing Buddhism is belief, understanding, practice and attainment. First, one needs to have unwavering belief, for without it one is unable to accept the Buddha's teachings. It is not that easy to instill this belief, as it depends on affinity or condition. In Buddhism, these conditions include **good roots**, good fortune, merits, virtues and cause. Without these, it would be extremely difficult to have this unwavering belief. In believing, one needs to first believe that one possesses the Buddha nature and that one can definitely become a Buddha. Second, we need to have confidence in our original teacher, Buddha Shakyamuni, knowing that he would not lie to us. We also need to believe that what the great masters and Patriarchs have passed down to us is truthful. However, simply believing is not enough.

Equally important is that one seeks the correct and perfect understanding. After understanding, one needs to accomplish, to practice, to apply Buddhist principles, methods and levels of attainment into one's daily living. Lastly, the attainment is to prove within our daily lives that all the teachings and understandings are correct.

Lately, I have heard some fellow practitioners mention that lacking a blessing from an Esoteric Master would seem to make one inferior to others. In reality, are these kinds of blessing all that effective? In America, many fellow practitioners were so enthusiastic about this ritual that they would even drive ten hours or more just to find a Master to obtain a consecration. After they came back, I asked them if they had uncovered their wisdom and had fewer afflictions. They honestly shook their heads and said no. I said, if a consecration is achieved by sprinkling a few drops of water on the head, then one might as well go take a shower to receive a great consecration.

Not understanding the true characteristics and meanings behind all the rituals reveals a very sad phenomenon in Buddhism. Mr. Nian-Chu Huang who was an Esoteric master, stated very clearly in his commentary of the *Infinite Life Sutra*, “The consecration is a blessing of compassion and kindness; one's head symbolizes the act of instilling in the person the outstanding teachings of the Buddha.”

Chapter Five: The Pure Land School

Today, as we practice the Pure Land method, we know that the *Infinite Life Sutra* is a very important sutra, thus is a supreme Dharma. Passing on the *Infinite Life Sutra* and the *Amitabha Sutra* to others brings them a great consecration. Reciting the sutra once is to receive consecration once from all the Buddhas in the ten directions. Reciting the sutra twice is to receive consecration twice from all the Buddhas. Therefore, one needs to understand the method in practicing, to start from the foundation of the Three Conditions.

As I said earlier, the first condition is to be filial and respectful toward parents and teachers; to be compassionate and not kill any living being; and to cultivate the Ten Good Conducts. Cultivation begins from here. If one thinks that one cannot accomplish the above, then no matter how one practices, it is only superficial. It is important for one to practice earnestly to accomplish these conditions or one may not attain the true benefits from the Buddha's teachings.

Ultimately, we return to the Pure Land method. Why? To return to the Pure Land method is what all Buddhas recommend we do. In the *Amitabha Sutra*, all the Buddhas in the six directions praise the Pure Land. In the *Infinite Life Sutra*, Buddha Shakyamuni was very clear in praising Buddha Amitabha as the most

respected, with the brightest of light, the king of all Buddhas. When returning to and relying upon a Buddha, who would be better than the best? Buddha Shakyamuni did not ask us to return and rely upon himself but rather upon Buddha Amitabha, for he is the ultimate Buddha of all Buddhas.

In the *Flower Adornment Sutra*, we see that Manjusri and Universal Worthy Bodhisattvas sought birth into the Western Pure Land. If the Western Pure Land were not so remarkable, why would these two Bodhisattvas of the Hwa Dzan world want to go to this particular Pure Land? The *Infinite Life Sutra* explains why one would want to chant Buddha Amitabha's name and be born into the Pure Land. If one would recite the *Infinite Life Sutra* more often and listen to lectures on it, one would come to a deeper and more meaningful understanding and cultivation.

If we do not wish to spend more time and energy to seek the truth of life and the universe, then following the teachings within this sutra would be sufficient and perfect. Why? In the future, after we are born into the Pure Land, our wisdom, virtuous abilities and enjoyments will be equal to those of Buddha Amitabha. We will then clearly understand the truth of life and the universe. Thus, as ancient wise people often said, the Pure Land method is a short cut to the ultimate Enlightenment.

Using other methods, we take a long circuitous route to achieve Enlightenment. Seeking birth into the Pure Land is the short cut that ensures us of attaining Enlightenment in one lifetime. From this, we know that this method is outstanding and beyond comparison. All Buddhas, Bodhisattvas and past Patriarchs praised this method. It is a rare opportunity for us to encounter it in this lifetime. As is said in the opening verse of the sutras, “Difficult to encounter in infinite eons.” Having encountered it in this lifetime, it would be unbearably sad to let this rarest of opportunities pass us by. It occurs so infrequently in infinite eons, we need to hold on tight, to not let go, to learn and practice it as earnestly and sincerely as we can.





Dedication

This book is dedicated to all the beings
in the ten directions.

In the present and in the future,
who have not yet been born into
Buddha Amitabha's Western Pure Land.

The Ten Recitation Method

The Ten-Recitation method is a simple, convenient, effective way to practice Buddha Name Recitation. It is especially suitable for those who find little time in the day for cultivation. Practicing this method helps us to regain **mindfulness of Buddha** Amitabha and brings us peace and clarity in the present moment.

The practice begins first thing in the morning when we wake up. We sit up straight and clearly recite “Namo Amitabha” ten times with an undisturbed mind, aloud or silently to ourselves. We repeat this process eight more times for the rest of the day. Altogether, we do one round of ten recitations, nine times a day, every day as follows:

1. Upon waking up
2. Before starting breakfast
3. After finishing breakfast
4. Before work
5. Before starting lunch
6. After finishing lunch
7. Before starting dinner
8. After finishing dinner
9. At bedtime

Altogether, this method is practiced nine times daily. The key is regularity; disruption of this practice will reduce its effectiveness. Without interruption, the cultivator will soon feel an increase in his/her purity of mind and wisdom.

Diligent practice of the Ten-Recitation Method, together with unwavering belief and vows, can ensure fulfillment of our wish to reach the Western Pure Land of Infinite Life and Infinite Light. We hope everyone will practice accordingly.



Glossary

Aeon. 1,334,000,000 years. Often expressed as the time it would take for a mountain of solid rock of ten cubic leagues to wear down if the tip of a heavenly maiden's delicate tunic brushed against it every hundred years. A fantastically long period of time.

Affliction. Condition or cause of pain, distress and suffering which disturbs the body and mind.

Amitabha (Sanskrit or Skrt). The name of the Buddha of the Western Pure Land, primarily meaning Infinite Life and Light. Called Amituofo in Chinese.

Anuttara-Samyak-Sambodhi (Skrt). Highest, proper and complete enlightenment.

Arhat (Skrt). One who has reached self-realization, a state in which one possesses no erroneous perceptions, views, speech or behavior.

Attachments. Fixed to certain ideas or objects.

Bodhi mind (Skrt). The great compassionate and sincere mind, with every thought to attain complete self-realization for self and other.

Bodhisattva (Skrt). One who helps others to reach realization after achieving their own.

Buddha (Skrt). One who has reached perfection in both self-realization and helping others to reach realization.

Delusion. False beliefs, wrong views.

Dharma (Skrt). 1) The teachings of the Buddha (generally capitalized in English); 2) Things, events, phenomena, everything; 3) Duty, law, doctrine.

Dharma-ending Age. The Dharma Perfect Age began with Buddha Shakyamuni's demise and lasted five hundred years, during which Enlightenment was often attained. The Dharma Semblance Age began after that and lasted one thousand years, during which Enlightenment was seldom attained. The Dharma Ending Age that we are now in began after that and will last for ten thousand years during which Enlightenment will rarely be attained.

Dusts. Metaphor for all the mundane things that can cloud our self-nature.

Eight Afflictions. Absence of embarrassment and shamefulness, and the presence of jealousy, stinginess, misdeeds, drowsiness, sleep and agitation.

Eighth Ground Bodhisattva. There are ten levels or grounds of a Bodhisattva's enlightenment which summarize the most important steps in a Bodhisattva's path right before attaining Buddhahood. Some say it is at this level that Bodhisattvas reach the stage of **Non-regression**, the level at which they will never retreat from the Bodhisattva-path.

Four Universal Vows of Buddhas and Bodhisattvas.
(1) Sentient beings are innumerable, I vow to help them all; (2) Afflictions are inexhaustible, I vow to end them all; (3) Ways to practice are boundless, I vow to master them all; (4) Enlightenment is unsurpassable, I vow to attain it.

Five Desires. Wealth, lust, food-drink, fame and sleep.

Five Guidelines. Following: 1) The Three Conditions; 2) The Six Principles of Harmony; 3) The Three Learnings, 4) The Six Paramitas or Principles and 5) Samantabhadra Bodhisattva's Ten Great Vows.

Five Pure Land Sutras and One Sastra. (1) The Buddha Speaks of the Infinite Life Sutra of Adornment, Purity, Equality and Enlightenment of the Mahayana School, (2) The Amitabha Sutra, (3) The Visualization Sutra, (4) The Chapter of Universal Worthy Bodhisattva's Conduct and Vows, (5) The Chapter on the Perfect Complete Realization of Great Strength Bodhisattva through Buddha Name Recitation from the Surangama Sutra and

(6) Vasubandhu Bodhisattva's Report on the Way to Reaching the Pure Land.

Good Fortune. Happiness, intelligence, wellbeing, prosperity etc.

Good roots. Good qualities or seeds sown by a good life to be reaped later.

Hungry Ghost. One of the three lower realms.

Hungry ghosts wander in a limbo-like state in which they can find no satisfaction for their desires, especially but not exclusively, for their hunger or thirst. One is reborn here if he or she has extreme greed.

Karma (Skrt). Law of Cause and Effect, results from thought, speech and behavior.

Karmic Result. The natural reward or **retribution** brought about by the Law of Cause and Effect (Karma).

Mahayana (Skrt). One of the two major branches of Buddhism. Bodhisattva path of helping all sentient beings to attain universal liberation.

Merits. The great benefits (wealth, intelligence, etc.) of the human and celestial realms; therefore, they are temporary and subject to birth and death. Virtues, on the other hand, are attained from one's pure mind and

enable one to transcend birth and death and lead to Buddhahood. An identical action, e.g. charity, can lead either to merit or virtue, depending on the mind of the practitioner, whether he or she is seeking ordinary rewards (merit) or transcendence (virtue).

Mindfulness of Buddha. Initially the mind remembers the Buddha and does not forget. After further cultivation, one constantly contemplates the Buddha.

Nine Realms. All **ten realms** minus the Buddha realm.

Non-regression. One who will never retreat from the Bodhisattva-path, some say it is not reached until the eighth of the ten grounds of a Bodhisattva.

Phenomena. Things, events, happenings, everything.

Prajna-Wisdom (Skrt). Intuitive wisdom.

Pratyekabuddha (Skrt). One who attains his enlightenment alone, independent of a teacher, with the objective of attaining Nirvana for him/herself.

Precepts. Rules set up by Buddha Shakyamuni to guide his students from erroneous thoughts, speech and behavior.

Pure Land. See Western Pure Land.

Pure Mind or Purity of Mind. The mind without discrimination or attachments.

Retribution. Karmic punishment from erroneous thought, speech or action.

Saha world (Skrt). Refers to our solar system, filled with suffering and afflictions, yet gladly endured by its inhabitants.

Samadhi (Skrt). Meditative absorption. Usually denotes the particular final stage of pure concentration and contemplation. There are many degrees and types of Samadhi.

Sangha (Skrt). Group of four or more peoples who properly practice the Buddha's teaching together, especially The Six Principles of Harmony.

Sanskrit (Skrt). Language of ancient India.

Sastra (Skrt). Commentary on sutras primarily by Bodhisattvas.

Self-Nature. Our original, true self that we still have, but is currently covered by deluded thoughts.

Sentient being. A living being that is aware of itself and can experience feeling or sensation.

Sharira (Skrt). Relics that remain after cremation indicating the person had attained some degree of purity of body and mind.

Six Paramitas or Principles. Giving, precept observation, patience, diligence, concentration and wisdom.

Six Principles of Harmony. 1) Share the same viewpoints or goals. 2) Observe the same precepts. 3) Live and practice together harmoniously. 4) Not quarrel. 5) Experience the inner peace and happiness from practicing together harmoniously. 6) To share benefits equally.

Six Realms. Three upper realms are heavens, asuras and humans. Three lower realms are animals, **hungry ghosts** and hells.

Six Senses. Sight, sound, smell, taste, touch and mind object.

Six Sense Objects. Form, sound, scent, taste, texture and mind object.

Six Sense Organs. Eyes, ears, nose, mouth, body and mind.

Sutra (Skrt). Teaching by the Buddha, initially given verbally, later compiled and written down by the Buddha's students.

Ten Directions. North, Northeast, East, Southeast, South, Southwest, West, Northwest, above and below.

Ten Good Conducts. No killing, stealing, sexual misconduct, lying, abusive language, backbiting, seductive words, greed, anger or ignorance.

Ten Great Vows of Samantabhadra Bodhisattva.

- 1) Pay respect to all Buddhas.
- 2) Praise “Thus Come One.”
- 3) Make offerings extensively.
- 4) Repent of Karmic obstacles.
- 5) Be joyful over others’ meritorious deeds.
- 6) Appeal to the Buddha to turn the Dharma wheel.
- 7) Request the Buddha to reside in this world.
- 8) Constantly be a diligent follower of the Buddha’s teaching.
- 9) Accord with all sentient beings.
- 10) Dedicate all merits.

Ten Realms. Six realms plus those of Buddhas, Bodhisattvas, **Pratyekabuddhas** and Sound-hearers.

Three Conditions. The first includes being filial and respectful to one’s parents and teachers, being compassionate and not killing any living beings and the Ten Good Conducts. The second is following the Three Refuges, precepts, laws and customs, and conducting oneself in a proper and dignified manner. Third is generating the Bodhi mind, deeply believing in the Law of Cause and Effect, reciting and upholding Mahayana sutras, and encouraging others to advance on the path to Enlightenment.

Three Learnings. Self-discipline, concentration and wisdom.

Three Poisons. Greed, anger and ignorance.

Three Refuges. We take refuge in the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha. When we take refuge in the Buddha, we are returning from our deluded state of mind and relying upon an awakened, understanding mind. When we take refuge in the Dharma, we are returning from deviant views and relying upon proper views and understanding. When we take refuge in the Sangha, we are returning from pollution and disharmony and relying upon purity of mind and the Six Principles of Harmony.

Transliteration. To represent (letters or words) in the corresponding characters of another alphabet, so the original sound is retained.

Virtues. See **Merits**.

Way Place. Usually called a temple, a place where Buddhist practitioners come to practice.

Western Pure Land. World created by Buddha Amitabha. An ideal place of cultivation, those who are born there are no longer subject to reincarnation.

“Wherever the Buddha's teachings have flourished, either in cities or countrysides, people would gain inconceivable benefits. The land and people would be enveloped in peace. The sun and moon will shine clear and bright. Wind and rain would appear accordingly, and there will be no disasters. Nations would be prosperous and there would be no use for soldiers or weapons. People would abide by morality and accord with laws. They would be courteous and humble. Everyone would be content and there would be no injustice. There would be no thefts or violence. The strong would not dominate the weak and everyone would get their fair share.”

The Sutra of Amitabha's Purity Equality, and Understanding

Dedication of Merit

May the merit and virtues
accrued from this work
Adorn the Buddha's Pure Land,
Repaying the four kinds
of kindness above,
and relieving the sufferings of
those in the Three Paths below.

May those who see and hear of this,
All bring forth the heart of
Understanding,
And live the Teachings for
the rest of this life,
Then be born together in
The Land of Ultimate Bliss!

Homage to Amitabha Buddha!

Verse for Transferring Merit

I vow that this merit
will adorn the Buddha's Pure Land
repaying four kinds of kindness above
aiding those below in the three paths of suffering
may those who see and hear
all bring forth the bodhi heart
and when this retribution body is done
be born together in the land of ultimate bliss.

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