



# The Buddha Speaks of Amitabha Sutra

*Translated into Chinese by:*  
Tripitaka Dharma Master Kumarajiva  
during the Yao Qin Dynasty

*Based on the English Translation by:*  
Buddhist Text Translation Society

*A General Explanation by:*  
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1<sup>st</sup> edition, ISBN 978-0-9835279-1-6,  
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## SPECIAL ACKNOWLEDGMENT

*I would like express my profound gratitude for the countless hours that my students and supporters put into the production of this Sutra.*

*Much of the information about the Buddha's disciples in this commentary is copied from Master Hsuan Hua's commentary of the same name. His work is also used as a source book throughout.*

*I encourage the reader to reference Master Xuan Hua's books, published by the Buddhist Text Translation Society, for further information. In addition, I would like to thank the Buddhist Text Translation Society for this translation of the Amitabha Sutra.*

*Master YongHua  
July, 2012*



Amitabha Buddha



Guan Yin Bodhisattva



Great Strength Bodhisattva

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## INTRODUCTION

### ***Five Major Schools of Asian Buddhism***

The Buddha Speaks of Amitabha Buddha Sutra is generally known as the (Small) Amitabha Sutra. It is one of the most important sutras of Pure Land Buddhism, which is one of the five major schools of Asian Buddhism:

1. The Vinaya School.
2. The Chan School.
3. The Secret School.
4. The Teachings School.
5. The Pure Land School.

The Vinaya School emphasizes the study and practice of morality. Buddhist lay disciples should take refuge with the Triple Jewel and then they can receive the Five Precepts, the Eight Precepts or the Bodhisattva Precepts. The foundation of lay morality is based on the Five Precepts:

1. No Killing, including ants, let alone hunting for sport.
2. No Stealing, including buying pirated goods.
3. No Sexual Misconduct: This means no sex outside of marriage.
4. No False Speech, including words intended to cause discord.
5. No Taking of Intoxicants, including alcohol, cigarettes, drugs etc.

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Left-home people can take the Ten Precepts of novice monks and nuns, Siksamana 式叉摩那尼 Precepts, Bhikshu Precepts, Bhikshuni Precepts or Bodhisattva Precepts.

Observing the precepts will bring forth samadhi, which is Sanskrit for concentration. Samadhi unfolds Wisdom and thus can help certify to the fruitions. This is the typical approach of the Small Vehicle, also known as Hinayana, that is very popular in countries like Sri Lanka, Myanmar, Cambodia, Western Europe, etc.

The Chan School emphasizes the development of samadhi. One can progress through from our normal state of scatteredness to the Four Dhyanas of the Form Realm, the Four Samadhis of the Formless Realm, the Ninth Samadhi of the Arhat, etc... all the way to the Tathagata's samadhi. Chan practitioners begin their cultivation training with the Five Stoppings of the Mind 五停心:

1. Contemplation of the Impure 不淨觀: Looking at how impure the body really is, thus reducing greed and desire and stopping the mad mind.
2. Contemplation of Kindness and Compassion 慈悲觀: This will counteract anger and rage and thus will stop the mad mind.
3. Contemplation of Causes and Conditions 因緣觀: Reflecting on the twelve conditioned links that explain how the world evolves, thus overcoming stupidity and stopping the mad mind.

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4. Contemplation of the Breath 數息觀: Using the breath counting techniques to overcome scatteredness and thus stop the mad mind.
5. Mindfulness of the Buddha 念佛觀: Reciting the Buddha's name, being mindful of the Buddha's merit and virtue, thus eradicating obstructions and retributions and stopping the mad mind.

You can progress along to increasingly higher levels of samadhis until you attain the Tathagata's Chan 如來禪. When inquired by his Master about his views, a Chan student replied, "Last year, I was so poor that my only possession was a ladle (made of bamboo to drink water from; you can see this type of utensil in Chinese and Japanese movies). This year, I am so poor that I don't even have a ladle." This means that last year, the pupil still was attached to one ladle. He was poor with material possessions but we need not be sympathetic to his plight. He had to become very rich in spiritual blessings before he could get to be so destitute materially. This year he detached from the ladle and therefore was enlightened. That is the Buddha's wisdom arising from the Tathagata's Chan. Chan is widely practiced in China, Korea, Japan, Vietnam etc.

The Secret School utilizes the Secret True Words Dharma 真言祕密之法. The Chinese and Japanese have their own set of sutras as their Bible: 毗盧遮那成佛經、金剛頂經等. They establish mandalas 曼荼羅, and practice mantras to the level where the three secrets and three karmas are

## Explained by Master YongHua

in compliance 修到三密、三業相應 and thus accomplish their purpose: becoming a Buddha. While the Chinese and Japanese also have secret sects, the Tibetans specialize in this practice.

The Teachings School puts the emphasis on the research and understanding of doctrine. They investigate the Buddhist canon: the Tripitaka, consisting of the Vinaya Store that contains the rules of morality and deportment, the Sutra Store which consists of sermons of the Buddha, and the Shastra Store that is the commentaries of the Buddha's enlightened disciples.

Understanding the Buddhist teaching is necessary for the unfolding of our inherent wisdom. All the other Schools must use the methods of the Teachings School to educate their followers on their School's doctrines. Conversely, the Teachings School must also rely on the other School's training techniques to develop samadhi before their wisdom can truly unfold.

Finally, the Pure Land School is the most popular school in our era, especially in Asia. It advocates rebirth to the Pure Lands where, unlike our Saha world, the conditions are much more favorable for cultivation. In fact, if we can make it to the Pure Lands, we can accomplish Buddhahood in one lifetime, thus escaping the dreadful Wheel of Reincarnation. Reciting Amitabha Buddha's name to obtain rebirth to his Western Bliss Pure Land is widely considered to be the only Pure Land practice. However, Amitabha's Pure Land is just one of many Pure Lands. For example, Medicine Master Buddha's

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Pure Land lies to the east as explained in our publication, The Medicine Master Sutra. In addition it is little known, even to Buddhists, that Maitreya's Pure Land is situated in the inner court of the Tushita Heaven.

The Pure Land Dharma is appropriate for all living beings of the three faculties: superior, average and inferior.

We hope to dispel the many confusions and misunderstandings about Pure Land Buddhism as we present our Pure Land Buddhism to the West.

Traditionally, the ancients consider the Pure Land teachings

to be contained in the three Pure Land Sutras 淨三經:

The Buddha Speaks of Amitabha Buddha Sutra, The Contemplation Sutra, and The Infinite Life Sutra. Some others also include two additional sutras: The Avatamsaka Chapter 40, The Universal Worthy Bodhisattva's Vows and Practices, and the chapter in The Shurangama Sutra on Great Strength Bodhisattva's Perfect Penetration, making Five Pure Land

Sutras in all 淨五經.

Among the Pure Land teachings, The Buddha Speaks of Amitabha Buddha Sutra is the most well-known. It is also the most often recited sutra. This is because by reciting it, it becomes easier to understand. The principles contained herein are quite profound and very hard to fathom thus making it very difficult to bring forth faith. We will therefore try to both retain its depth and preserve the spirit of the teachings

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while also offering elaborations in simple terms, hopefully making it more understandable to the ordinary reader.

### ***Translator***

**Translated into Chinese by Tripitaka Dharma Master  
Kumarajiva of Yáo Qín.**

A Tripitaka Dharma Master:

1. Takes the Tripitaka as teacher.
2. Explains the Dharma to living beings.

There are four kinds of Dharma Masters:

1. Those who explain Dharma for others 講解, through lecturing sutras and discussing the principles of the Dharma.
2. Those who read and recite sutras for others 讀誦.
3. Those who write out sutras for others 書寫.
4. Those who accept and maintain sutras themselves 受持: They accept the sutra principles with their mind, and put its principles into practice with their body.

All the Buddhist sutras are for the sake of providing knowledge to help living beings awaken to the true principles. Depending on their potential and particular circumstances, this is accomplished through the four Kinds of Complete Giving:



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1. Mundane Complete Giving 世間悉檀: One practices giving by using worldly means. This enables living beings to obtain bliss and benefit. In particular, when hearing about the Pure Land and Amitabha, living beings will give rise to happiness.
2. Curative Complete Giving 對制悉檀: By targeting specific problems one enables living beings to obtain the benefit of eradicating evil. For example, the Dharma of Contemplating the Impure can be transmitted to quell desires. Just execute it as instructed in thought after thought, and you will extinguish evil karmas of body, mouth and mind.
3. Universal Complete Giving 為人悉檀: This kind of giving is done for the sake of all living beings, and enables them to obtain the possibility of rebirth. After hearing of this Dharma Door, they bring forth the desire to be reborn and draw near Amitabha Buddha. They only need to recite the Buddha's name to obtain rebirth. Universal Complete Giving thus contributes to the causes and conditions for numerous good roots, merits and virtues.
4. Primary Meaning Complete Giving 第一義悉檀: This final type of giving involves sharing the ultimate truth with all living beings, who therefore obtain the benefit of entering the principles. This Dharma calls for reciting the Buddha's name. In time, as their gong-fu deepens, they will awaken to the Primary Meaning and obtain the "One mind unconfused in principle."

## Explained by Master YongHua

The Chinese version that is the basis of our English translation was translated from Sanskrit into Chinese by Tripitaka Dharma Master Kumarajiva 鳩摩羅什. The Chinese historical records have many details on his life.

Yáo Qín 姚秦 (344-413 A.D.) refers to the period of Emperor Yáo Xing's reign 姚興.

Dharma Master Kumarajiva's father, Kumarayana 鳩摩羅炎, was the son of a prime minister. Instead of succeeding his father, Kumarayana left the home-life and went looking for a teacher. He did not really receive the monks' precepts but was a cultivator. When he reached Kucha 龜茲國 in Central Asia, the Kucha king's younger sister fell in love with him and they got married by royal decree. Kumarayana then became an official in the court of the king and his wife soon became pregnant. As in Ven. Shariputra's case, she defeated everyone in debates, prompting an Arhat to say, "The child in this woman's womb is certainly one of great wisdom." She gave birth to Kumarajiva.

Ven. Kumarajiva has outstanding memory. In one day he could memorize more than 36,000 words 一千首的偈頌。這一千首偈頌就有三萬六千個字. In two days he was able recite the entire Dharma Blossom Sutra from memory.

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At the age of seven, he followed his mother to a temple and lifted a large steel incense urn over his head effortlessly... Doubt arose: he thought, "I'm only a child, how can I lift this heavy urn?" and he immediately had to drop the urn prompting him to realize that "the ten thousand things are made from the mind alone." He and his mother decided to leave the home-life.

His father refused, so his mother went on a hunger fast. After six days, she nearly died and forced her husband to give in. She asked for her hair to be cut (which actually enabled her to certify to First Stage Arhatship) before she would eat again.

Soon, they both left the home-life. Kumarajiva began to study the sutras. He had photographic memory. He first studied Hinayana in Kasmir 罽賓國 under his teacher 槃頭達多法師 until the age of twelve. Then his mother took him back to Kucha. On the way, an Arhat took a look and told his mother that if this boy managed not to break precepts by the age of 35, he would save countless living beings. He began to study the Mahayana teachings under Dharma Master Śūryasoma 須利耶蘇摩 and truly excelled.

He then went back to Kasmir to visit his previous Hinayana teacher, for whom he expounded the Mahayana teachings. His original teacher was eventually convinced and also converted to Mahayana. His Hinayana teacher asked to bow to Ven. Kumarajiva as his teacher. Great Master Kumarajiva dared not accept. His ex-teacher said, "I am a Hinayana

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monk. What's improper about me bowing to a Mahayana monk?" Ven. Kumarajiva thus accepted. He then returned to Kucha, his own country. His mother foresaw that the fortunes of the country were declining. She therefore decided to go to Tibet where she certified to Third Stage Arhatship. Before leaving, she advised her son to go to China to spread Mahayana and forsake his life to serve Buddhism and benefit living beings.

Kumarajiva defeated all non-Buddhist philosophers in India and became very well known. His reputation spread to China. The Chinese Emperor Fú Jian 苻堅 was advised by his astrologer of a most auspicious stellar manifestation in India indicating that a great virtuous and wise man would come to China. The Emperor immediately dispatched the great general Lu Guang 呂光 and 70,000 troops to Kucha to capture Kumarajiva and bring him back to China. Kumarajiva advised the Kucha King not to fight the Chinese troops because they did not intend to invade the country but only wanted to take him back to China. His uncle, the king, didn't listen and went to war and lost the battle. As a result, the king was executed, the country defeated and Kumarajiva was captured.

On the way back, the general camped in the low valley against Kumarajiva's advice. That night there was a huge deluge that drowned a lot of soldiers. In addition, when they got mid-way back, the general stopped, staying in the area of Liang Zhou 涼州 instead of returning, because Emperor Fú Jian 苻堅 had, in the meantime, been deposed by Yáo Cháng 姚萇. Emperor Yáo Cháng reigned for several years before

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his nephew Yáo Xing 姚興 took over. The Emperor Yáo Xing also heard of Master Kumarajiva and asked Lu Guang for him. Lu Guang, who by now had installed himself as king in the area, refused. The new Emperor dispatched troops to defeat Lu Guang's army and brought Kumarajiva to Cháng An 常安 in China. The Emperor bestowed many honors on the Master, conferred the title of National Master upon him and put him in charge of translating the Sanskrit Buddhist texts into Chinese. Subsequently, Kumarajiva lead over 800 monks in the translation work, and oversaw the translation of 98 divisions and more than 390 rolls.

Kumarajiva said that if his translations were correct, his tongue would not burn when cremated. When he died, his body burned but his tongue remained intact.

Táng Dynasty Vinaya Master Dào Xuan 道宣 once asked the God Lù Xuán Cha 陸玄暢 why everyone preferred to read and study Kumarajiva's translations. The heavenly being replied that Great Master Kumarajiva had been the translation Master for the past seven Buddhas. Hence his translations are most accurate. The Buddhas are mindful and protective of them, the dragons and gods guard and protect them, and people like to receive and maintain them.

The seven Buddhas are as follows:

1. 毗婆尸佛 - Vipasyin
2. 尸棄佛 - Sikhin
3. 毗舍浮佛 - Vísabhū

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4. 拘留孫佛 - Krakucchanda
5. 拘那含牟尼佛 - Kanakamuni
6. 迦葉佛 - Kasyapa
7. 釋迦牟尼 - Śhākyamuni.

Great Master Kumarajiva certified to Third Stage Arhatship.

Kumarajiva is Sanskrit for *tóng shòu* 童壽, a Sanskrit term meaning “youth of long life.” This could mean that Kumarajiva would live to a great old age or that he may be young in years but mature in wisdom, eloquence and virtue. This was because as a youth he had the wisdom of an old man.

Kumarajiva’s translations:

- Have the mindful protection of the Buddhas 諸佛護念.
- Are surrounded and protected by the dragons and gods 龍天擁衛.
- Are very popular. Many people like to receive and maintain them 人人歡喜受持.

Dharma Master Xuán Zàng of the Táng dynasty also translated this sutra. Both Chinese translations are quite similar.

Furthermore, the English text we use is based on the work of The Buddhist Text Translation Society which was established by my late teacher, Great Master Xuan Hua who founded the Dharma Realm Buddhist Association (DRBA) and the City of

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Ten Thousand Buddhas (CTTB). He brought Mahayana to the United States and trained many outstanding disciples. I am particularly grateful to them for their superb translation work of the Chinese Cannon into English. Their numerous translations are by far the most accurate and contain very advanced Buddhist concepts that can only be understood by people who have been certified to them. In contrast, intellectuals can only understand the words and language but not the Buddha's intention.

Great Master Xuan Hua already explained this sutra. I am also explaining it so as to add my obtuse and shallow understanding about Pure Land Buddhism, for the following reasons:

1. To repay my teacher's kindness, by adding to the Mahayana store of knowledge here in the West.
2. To elaborate on some aspects of Pure Land Buddhism that my late teacher did not have time to do. In fact, we took the time to do a thorough survey of the explanations of the patriarchs and enlightened authors. The list is quite extensive. Making the effort of digesting their work, putting them in the context and elaborating their viewpoint under the light of the modern times is sufficient to justify publishing this work.
3. Again, to dispel the many misconceptions about Pure Land Buddhism which may lead the uninformed to dismiss it as superstition.
4. At our temple, we prefer to do both Chan and Pure Land practice. That is why we use a lot of Chan terminology and techniques to explain the Pure Land Dharma Door.

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5. As you may have noticed by now, we appended many of the original Chinese texts to preserve the original intent of the sages, the depth of which we clearly have no way of grasping. Perhaps, those who do understand would be kind enough to help elaborate.

In all due respect to all the senior seated virtuous sanghans, I humbly beg for forgiveness if I appear to be boastful by publishing my commentary. Furthermore, should there be any inaccuracies in my explanations, I would greatly appreciate being corrected so that we can all better understand Buddhism.

According to tradition, we can make a cursory analysis of the sutra with the Tian Tai five-fold profound meanings.

### ***Tian Tai 5-fold profound meanings:***

- I. (Explain) Title:
- II. (Describing) Substance:
- III. (Clarify) Doctrine/principles:
- IV. (Discussing) Function: discussing the sutra's power and its use.
- V. (Determining) Teaching: determine its role in the Buddha's teachings.

### **Explaining the Title:**

The full title of the sutra is **The Buddha Speaks of Amitabha Buddha Sutra**.



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**Buddha** refers to Shakyamuni Buddha, the teaching host of our Saha world.

Buddha is the enlightened one.

Saha 娑婆 means “can endure 堪忍.” From the Buddha’s perspective, living beings here are very hard to regulate and teach but the Buddha is able to endure those difficulties. Living beings, on the other hand, get used to the suffering of this turbid world and would not even think of leaving.

Originally, at the first kalpa, the Light Sound Heaven (光音天) gods came to India. They ate the earth’s crust, which is also called the earth’s fat because it is rather tasty. They got full and could not return to the Light Sound Heaven and fathered the human species. This heaven is called the Brahma Heaven.

Enlightenment has three kinds:

1. Inherent 本 enlightenment: Ordinary living beings are confused but intrinsically are fully endowed with the enlightened nature. However, they are unaware of their intrinsic enlightened nature. That is why it is called inherent enlightenment. Although they are confused about their nature, it is still inherently part of them. In other words, we all are of the same substance as the Buddhas of the ten directions, only we are not yet accomplished Buddhas. This is a secret that the Buddhists share.

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2. Initial 始 enlightenment: Confused beings meet with Good Knowing Advisers and begin to practice the Way. They begin to read sutras, investigate the teachings, practice Chan, and recite the Buddha's name so that their wisdom starts to unfold. That is how we can all begin to awaken to our original face and reconnect with our inherent enlightened nature. This is initial enlightenment.
3. Ultimate 究竟 enlightenment: Inherent enlightenment belongs to noumenon; initial enlightenment belongs to wisdom that arises from the principles learned. All living beings already have the inherent (inner) causes for enlightenment. That is, they already possess the enlightened nature. If they have the blessings to encounter a Good Knowing Adviser and other external conditions to bring about initial enlightenment, then ultimately, their wisdom will be perfected and become the great wisdom of a Buddha, which is ultimate enlightenment.

Shakyamuni means:

- Shakya 能仁: able and humane. He kindly rescues living beings. He is very compassionate: He comes to our defiled world to help us instead of choosing to remain in Nirvana.
- Muni 寂默: still and silent. Still indicates the absence of movement: That is profound samadhi. Silence symbolizes wisdom which cannot be expressed by words because all dharmas cannot be spoken of.

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- Shakyamuni is not separate from Muni; wisdom is not separate from compassion and kindness; movement is not separate from stillness. Thus he vastly rescues all living beings.

There are three kinds of compassion:

1. Loving Contemplation Compassion 愛觀悲, which in ordinary people is of limited range. In particular, people cannot extend it to other species.
2. Dharma Conditions Compassion 法緣悲: In addition to the first kind of compassion, the Two Vehicles practitioners also have compassion which is based on their understanding of conditioned dharmas. They understand emptiness and compassionately help living beings without being attached to the process.
3. Same Substance Compassion 同體悲: This is the Great Compassion of the enlightened beings.

The Buddhas possess the following characteristics: three Bodies: a Reward Body, a Dharma Body and a Transformation Body; four Wisdoms: the Great Perfect Mirror Wisdom, the Wonderful Observing Wisdom, the Wisdom of Accomplishing What is Done, and the Equality Wisdom; and six spiritual penetrations: the Heavenly Eye, the Heavenly Ear, the Knowledge of Others' thoughts, the Knowledge of Past Lives, the Spiritual Foot and the Extinction of Outflows.

“Body” contains the notion of “accumulation.” We obtain our body through the accumulation of the various karmic

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retributions. For example, those who are now well-off are enjoying the rewards for practicing giving in the past and are now born into such comfortable and pleasant surroundings. In contrast, the Buddha is not the same. He has already exhausted his retributions and emptied his consciousness 業盡識空. That is why he has three bodies and we only have one.

The three bodies of the Buddha:

1. The Dharma Body is the accumulation of noumena 理積聚, that occurs due to the uniting of True Suchness Dharma principles 積聚真如理法以為身. True Suchness is perfect and pure, pervading everywhere. The Dharma is also thus. This is Vairochana Buddha 毘盧遮那佛, which is Sanskrit for “pervading everywhere 遍一切處. The Dharma Body is beginningless and endless.
2. The Reward Body arises from the accumulation of wisdom 智慧積聚, from the uniting of all sorts of wisdom 積聚一切種智以為身. It is obtained through cultivation. True wisdom is perfected and ignorance is totally destroyed. That is why it is called the perfect reward body. This is Nishyanda 盧舍那佛: no delusion, only pure and perfect wisdom Buddha. The Reward Body has a beginning but no end.
3. The Response Body is accumulated from merit and virtue 功德積聚, from the uniting of countless mer-

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its and virtues. It is simply the use or function of wisdom. For example, Shakyamuni Buddha practiced for three asamkhyeya kalpas to accrue blessings and wisdom. Then he continued for 100 kalpas to obtain 32 hallmarks and 80 subtle characteristics. The Response Body has a beginning and an end. For instance, Shakyamuni Buddha is a response body.

Some cultivators may have a little bit of spiritual power and may possess the Five Eyes: the Heavenly Eye, the Flesh Eye, the Wisdom Eye (which can help us see the “genuine truth”), the Dharma Eye (which can help us see the “mundane truth”), and the Buddha Eye.

A verse about the Five Eyes goes like this:

*The Heavenly Eye penetrates without obstructions.*

天眼通非礙

*The Flesh Eye sees obstacles but does not penetrate.*

肉眼礙非通

*The Dharma Eye contemplates the mundane.*

法眼唯觀俗

*The Wisdom Eye understands True Emptiness.*

慧眼了真空

*The Buddha Eye shines like a thousand suns.*

佛眼如千日

*Although the illuminations differ, their substance is one.*

照異體還同

## Explained by Master YongHua

“Speaks” has the following connotations:

- When the time is right, the Buddha uses the eight sounds, as explained in the 42 Sections Sutra, as well as the four eloquences, to explain to the right audience.
- He speaks with great delight 悦 about what he so wants to reveal regarding this wonderful Pure Land Dharma Door.
- Deep down he knows that there is nothing that can be said, but he must use expedients to say what he can to help us out.
- Out of pity for living beings’ suffering, the Buddha speaks of this Dharma to the Great Assembly, consisting of representatives from all the nine realms.

Five kinds of beings may speak sutras:

1. The Buddhas
2. The Buddha’s disciples
3. Gods
4. Immortals
5. Transformation beings (Gods, Buddhas transformed into human forms, etc ...)

All must receive the Buddha’s certification before they speak sutras or else they cannot be called sutras.

**Amitabha Buddha** refers to the teaching host of the Western Bliss Pure Land. We will elaborate later.

**Amitabha** is Sanskrit for “limitless light”, referring to wisdom. Another name is Amitayus, meaning limitless life, symbolizing blessings and virtues. Not only are his life and light limitless, but his wisdom, merit and virtue, and spiritual

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penetrations are also limitless.

On the causal ground, Amitabha was a Wheel Turning Sage King. He listened to World Self-Mastery King Buddha 世自在王佛 speak Dharma, gave up his throne and left the home-life. He became Dharma Treasury Bhikshu 法藏比丘. As a monk, he made 48 great vows in front of the Buddha to adorn the proper and dependent retributions of his Pure Land. Vow number twelve specifies that his Buddha life will be limitless and last at least one hundred thousand billion 百千億那由他劫 nayutas of great kalpas. Vow number thirteen states that his light will be limitless. The twelfth vow says that his light also will shine upon a limitless number of Buddhaholds. Some of the other vows are as follows: number one states that his land will have no hells; number forty eight states that Bodhisattvas of the other directions, when hearing Amitabha Buddha's name will obtain the first, second and third dharma patience.

After he perfected his vows and practices, he became Amitabha Buddha.

In his land, the Proper Dharma age lasts for limitless kalpas. There is no semblance of the Dharma age or the Dharma-ending age. The Proper Dharma disappears during the upper half night 上半夜. In the lower half night, Guan Yin will accomplish Buddhahood, and be named Universal Light Merit and Virtue Mountain King 普光功德山王佛. Guan Yin will then take over for Amitabha Buddha, only the Pure

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Land will no longer be called The Land of Ultimate Bliss but will be called The Multitude of Jewels Universally Assembled Adornments 眾寶普集莊嚴.

**Sutra** is the general name for the Buddha's discourses. It is a Sanskrit word 修多羅 which can be translated as 'tallying text' 契經. Tallying above with all the principles 理 taught by the Buddhas of the three periods of time (past, present and future), and below with the potentials 機 of the living beings of the nine realms (non-Buddhas).

All the Buddha's teachings tally our potential. This particular sutra postulates another method of practice that helps living beings leave suffering and attain bliss. It is a cure for our many afflictions and difficulties. We should definitely take advantage of it to find a shortcut on the road to Buddhahood.

The word sutra contains several meanings:

1. To string together 貫: Sutras act as a string 線 that connect the principles together to make them coherent and not scattered.
2. To gather in or attract 攝: Those who can be helped so that they do not fall into the evil paths are "gathered in or attracted" so that they can ascend towards Buddhahood.
3. Constant 常: The sutras do not change with time and space. The principles contained are the same ones that are spoken Buddhas of the past, present and future, anywhere in the Dharma Realm.



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4. A Dharma 法: A method of practice, especially useful for developing samadhi. The Buddha's Dharma is highly revered in the ten directions. All the bodhisattvas rely on it to arrive at Buddha fruition.
5. A bubbling spring 湧泉: Because the flavor of the principles 義味 is endless like a bubbling spring.
6. A chalk line 繩墨: Just like the carpenter's tool, which can help make straight lines and squares, sutras can also help us discern the proper from the deviant.
7. A path 徑: Just follow it to quickly get to your destination.
8. A flower garland 結鬘: The sutras beautifully and artfully connect all the postulated principles like a flower garland.

Title classifications: Titles can contain three types of references: person, analogy or dharma. Sutra titles can be:

1. Single, of which there are three types 三單. Person 單人立題: e.g. the Amitabha Sutra 佛說阿彌陀經, Dharma: e.g. the Maha Nirvana Sutra 大涅槃經, Analogy: e.g. the Brahma Net Sutra 梵網經.
2. Dual, of which there are also three types 三複. Person and Dharma 人法立題: e.g. The Sutra of Manjusri's Questions on Prajna 文殊師利問般若經, Person and Analogy: e.g. The Lion Roar of the Thus Come One Sutra 如來獅子吼經, Dharma and

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Analogy: e.g. the Wonderful Dharma Flower Lotus Sutra 妙法蓮華經.

3. Complete in one 人法喻具足立題. Person, Analogy and Dharma: e.g. The Great Means Expansive Buddha Flower Adornment Sutra 大方廣佛華嚴經.

In brief, this sutra title refers to a person classification.

### **Describing the substance**

The sutra takes Real Mark as substance.

Real Mark is the absence of marks. It is non-dual: not inside or outside or in between; not in the past, present or future; not black or white, long or short, square or circular, having no odor or touch or taste. Look for it and it cannot be found. Speak of it and it cannot be expressed. It can create the thousand worlds and you cannot fathom its limits. It is apart from all conditions and discernment, separate from words and language and yet words and language are not different from it. It is still and yet can move. Stillness and movement are not dual. Body and Pure Land are not dual. Nature and cultivation are not dual.

There is no mark\_ This is referred to as True Emptiness\_ and yet there is nothing that is not marked\_ This is referred to as Wonderful Existence. Other names for Real Mark are True Suchness, the one true Dharma Realm, the Thus Come One's Store Nature.

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### Clarify the doctrine

The Pure Land Dharma Door is the faster practice track, replete with all three studies and six paramitas.

The principles covered are the three requisites of the Pure Land Dharma Door:

1. Faith.
2. Vows.
3. Practice: holding the Buddha's name.

#### Faith:

Faith comes first because it is the mother of all merit and virtue. Without it, one will not enter this Dharma Door and make the vow to be reborn in Amitabha Buddha's Pure Land.

Faith has several aspects. 信則信自，信他，信因，信果，信事，信理

信自者，信我現前一念之心，本非肉團，亦非緣影；豎無初後，橫絕邊涯；終日隨緣，終日不變。十方虛空微塵國土，元我一念心中所現物。我雖昏迷倒惑，苟一念回心，決定得生自心本具極樂，更無疑慮。是名信自

First, we should have faith in ourselves. We deserve to be reborn there. Even though we are not enlightened yet, we can carry our karma along to the Western Bliss Pure Land. Once

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we are there, these past karmas cannot cause trouble and we can safely cultivate. It is unlike our Saha world where we are constantly faced with all sorts of obstructions and distractions. Once we resolve to cultivate, it is not uncommon to encounter numerous obstructions. For instance, one might get a promotion that requires one to work longer hours so that one no longer has time to visit the temple on the weekends.

At a deeper level, we believe that we are endowed with the true mind, not the one with which we do mental processing, perform recognition and perceive! This true mind transcends time and space. All the worlds are simply manifestations of this true mind, including the Western Bliss Pure Land. The Land of Utmost Bliss was purified by the mind of Bhikshu Dharma Treasury while he was on his causal grounds, cultivating the Bodhisattva path.

信他者，信釋迦如來決無誑語，彌陀世尊決無虛願，六方諸佛廣長舌決無二言。隨順諸佛真實教誨，決志求生，更無疑惑。是名信他。

Next, we should have faith in others, in addition to having having faith in ourselves. The true mind is present in everyone. However, we are still confused—that is why we do not know how to use it yet. Therefore, we should believe in the Buddha's true mind. Living beings and the Buddhas all share the same nature. We are of the same substance. To believe in the Buddha is to believe in oneself.

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We should trust that Shakyamuni and all the other Buddhas are speaking the truth when they praise the Pure Land Dharma Door. They really are trying to help us quickly obtain liberation.

信因者，深信散亂稱名，猶為成佛種子，況一心不亂，安得不生淨土。是名信因。  
信果者，深信淨土，諸善聚會，皆從念佛三昧得生，如種瓜得瓜，種豆得豆，亦如影必隨形，響必應聲，決無虛棄。是名信果。

Next, believe in cause and effect. We must have already planted good roots in the past, in order to be encountering the Pure Land Dharma Door now. We should firmly believe that reciting the Buddha's name is the cause for rebirth. We ought to believe that rebirth of the multitude of sages in the Western Pure Land is powered by their recitation causes. We only have to follow them to make it to security. The Pure Land is no different from the pure mind. Since our mind is impure due to evil external influences, we can simply go to the Pure Land to have a better chance to purify our mind since it is free of external evil conditions. Rebirth to the Pure Land is the effect or fruition. We should deeply believe in the Western Bliss Pure land. We can truly obtain rebirth there as a result of the Buddha recitation samadhi (cause). As the patriarchs proclaimed: if we recite the Buddhas name, we will surely obtain rebirth to the Pure Land.

信理者，深信十萬億土，實不出我今現前介爾

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一念心外，以吾現前一念心性實無外故。又深信西方依正主伴，皆吾現前一念心中所現影。全事即理，全妄即真，全修即性，全他即自。我心遍故，佛心亦遍，一切眾生心性亦遍。譬如一室千燈，光光互遍，重重交攝，不相妨礙。是名信理。

Next, believe in the noumena 理, or principles. We should believe that in principle, it is easier to obtain rebirth to the Pure Land through reliance on Amitabha Buddha's vow powers than it is to attain enlightenment this lifetime. In fact, the Western Bliss Pure Land came about through the manifestation of Amitabha Buddha's true mind.

信事者，深信只今現前一念不可盡故，依心所現十方世界亦不可盡。實有極樂國在十萬億土外，最極清淨莊嚴，不同莊生寓言。是名信事。

We also should believe in the phenomena 事, or manifestations. The Western Bliss Pure Land really exists just as all the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas say. Amitabha Buddha has great affinity with the living beings of our Saha world. He created his Pure Land Dharma Door in order to make it easier for us to get out of the revolving wheel.

如此信已，則娑婆即自心所感之穢，而自心穢，

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理應厭離。極樂即自心所感之淨，而自心淨，理應欣求。厭穢須捨至究竟，方無可捨。欣淨須取至究竟，方無可取。故《妙宗》云：取捨若極，與不取捨亦非異轍。設不從事取捨，但尚不取不捨，即是執理廢事。既廢於事，理亦不圓。若達全事即理，則取亦即理，捨亦即理。一取一捨，無非法界。

The Avatamsaka Sutra speaks of four Dharma Realms:

1. The Dharma Realm of Unobstructed Phenomena 事無礙法界.
2. The Dharma Realm of Unobstructed Noumena 理無礙法界.
3. The Dharma Realm of Noumena and Phenomena Unobstructed 理事無礙法界.
4. The Dharma Realm of All Phenomena Unobstructed 事事無礙法界: in principle we can all become Buddhas and eventually we will phenomenally get there. It is like having a thousand torches in a room, each emits light and one does not obstruct the others.

Vows:

願則厭離娑婆，欣求極樂

Once we have faith, we should next make vows because we

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detest the suffering of the Saha world which was created by the defilements of our mind. Whether you are rich or poor, suffering or unaware of suffering, you must wake up because life is but a dream! And then seek the peace and bliss of the Western Bliss Pure Land, a land created and adorned by the purification of our mind.

All living beings in the past, present and future rely on the four great vows to realize Buddhahood:

1. I vow to save limitless living beings, according to the Truth of Suffering.
2. I vow to cut off the inexhaustible afflictions, according to the Truth of Origination.
3. I vow to study the immeasurable Dharma Doors, according to the Truth of the Way.
4. I vow to realize the supreme Buddha Way, according to the Truth of Extinction.

The process of making vows is important because it helps us reaffirm our path to Buddhahood, putting into motion an alignment of our spiritual and material resources. Seeds are formed which are then stored in our Alaya consciousness and serve as fuel to propel us towards rebirth to the Pure Lands. In particular, these seeds create handles for the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas to come along and pull us to the Pure Lands.

Why did you fail in your cultivation and why do still revolve in the reincarnation wheel? It is because your vows were not vast enough or not sincere enough. Now that you wish to make vows for rebirth to the Pure Lands, consider the following aspects:



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1. Make vows to get out of the revolving wheel permanently. Cycling through it is rather undesirable because we have very little control over where we will go next every time we change bodies. If the good seeds mature we go to the good paths of the human and heavenly realms. However, if the bad seeds are activated, we could end up in the evil paths of the asura, animal, hungry ghost and hell realms. If you understand the Dharma, you would work towards getting out as soon as possible. We should not seek to enjoy worldly blessings this lifetime or in future lifetimes.
2. Make vows to horizontally escape the Triple Realm of the Desire Realm, the Form Realm and the Formless Realm. Do not seek to enjoy the heavenly or earthly veneration and do not seek retributions with outflows.
3. Vow to universally save all living beings. Do not scheme for one life's bliss and benefit, or to benefit only oneself.
4. Vow to be reborn to the Pure Land as soon as possible. Do not be greedy for the five desires and joys of this turbid world because they only make us stagnate and fail. Besides, they will deteriorate anyway.
5. Vow to realize one's potential. Originally we were endowed with the full efficacious nature. Because we became confused we allowed the dusts and afflictions to obstruct and bind us. Now that we have obtained a human body, encountered the Buddhadharma, and

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heard of Amitabha Buddha's Dharma Door, we should be glad, resolve to draw near Amitabha Buddha, listen to the Dharma and enlighten to the Way. Do not keep on missing this boat. As the saying goes, "The Buddha is inside the mind and yet people go seeking outside. They are confused about the true, go chasing after the false and thus miss the opportunity for one thousand autumns 佛在此心頭, 時人向外求, 迷真每逐妄, 錯過幾千秋." If you can contemplate like this, then you can make an utmost sincere vow on behalf of yourself to seek a place where you can live peacefully and safely.

6. Vow to end suffering and attain bliss. Suffering and bliss are direct opposites. In the Saha world, we are oppressed by a multitude of different types of suffering; in contrast, there is only bliss in the land of Utmost Bliss. In our world, the heavenly blessings are not permanent. The bliss in the Desire Heavens and first three Dhyana Heavens will eventually come to an end: that is the suffering of decay. When you are in samadhi of the Fourth Dhyanas of the Form Realm as well as in the Four Samadhis of the Formless Realm, you are free from suffering and bliss but cannot stop the activity skandha. Regardless, when your heavenly blessings are exhausted, you will fall. As Dharma Master YongJia says in his "Song of Enlightenment": practicing giving and observing precepts will produce heavenly blessings. However, it is like shooting an arrow into the sky; when the force withers the arrow will fall, bringing undesirable consequences in future lives.

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There was a Taoist named Lu Chun Yang 呂純陽 who paid a visit to Chan Master Yellow Dragon 黃龍禪師. Lu first hid under the bell tower to listen to the master's sutra lecture. Master Yellow Dragon knew and declared that there was a Dharma thief. Lu heard and immediately appeared to say, "I already have the immortality dharma. Why do I need to steal your Dharma?" The Chan master simply replied, "You are a corpse guardian ghost 守屍鬼." Lu was unimpressed and asked, "One grain contains the entire world, a half liter pot can cook the three thousand worlds 一粒粟中藏世界，半升鐺內煮三千: what is that state?" The Chan master replied, "Even if you can live for 80,000 kalpas, it's just like dying in empty space 縱經八萬劫，猶自落空亡." Lu had an immediate awakening. He abandoned Taoism and became a Buddhist. The immortals failed to understand that long life or life in the heavens is not the same as being free from suffering. Only the Pure Land Dharma Door can affect an instantaneous escape and end birth and death.

7. Vow not to regress. The Western Bliss Pure Land residents are all avaiivartikas 阿鞞跋致: they have attained the state of "non-regressing." On the other hand, in this Saha world, living beings commit heavy offenses and therefore encounter severe obstructions. Cultivating here is like rowing a boat upstream: it is

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hard to make headway and easy to fall back. This is because there is no solid, strong vow to sustain faith and practice. Therefore out of one million people, it is hard for even one individual to succeed in cultivation. Either they quit early because they lack determination or they eventually quit because they encounter demonic obstructions, or evil friends.

Typically, they have made no significant accomplishments and their lives have already come to an end. Once they are born into a new body, they forget everything and must start over again. It is not easy to succeed in the turbid world unless you have deep roots and have proper knowledge and views. Even in this case, if the conditions are unfavorable, the prior cultivation may be abandoned; if the conditions are favorable, we forget about cultivating and tend to chase after material things.

Even the Tenth Faith Bodhisattvas, who already brought forth the great resolve to cultivate, will sometimes progress and sometimes regress. Like a feather floating in space, Bodhisattvas who cultivate the Ten Faiths must pass through 10,000 kalpas for the mind of faith to be complete, the good roots to mature and certify to the First Dwelling, thus obtaining non-regression in position 位不退.

If you recite the Buddha's name and obtain rebirth to the Western Bliss Pure Land, you can immediately certify to the three non-regressions of position,

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practice and mind.

8. Vow to be born by transformation on a lotus flower and personally see Amitabha Buddha. Then this life will not have been in vain. The Dharma Flower Sutra says, “For a Buddha to appear in the world is rare like the uppala flower.” We are born in the Dharma ending age after the Buddha entered Nirvana. Yet we are blessed enough to obtain this human body and have the opportunity to practice the Pure Land Dharma. Therefore, we should seize the opportunity and make the resolve for Bodhi, vow to be born on a golden lotus dais and personally see Amitabha Buddha.

During the Song dynasty there was a bhikshu named Mind Jade 懷玉 who vigorously cultivated the pure conduct on Mount Tian Tai for a length of time. One day he saw Amitabha Buddha appear in space with heavenly music resounding. Amitabha was holding a silver lotus dais to bring him back to the Pure Land. The master immediately realized that his lifetime of devotion to reciting the Buddha’s name earned him this honor. However, it was not what he expected and therefore he refused to go with Amitabha Buddha. He knew that his practice was not good enough and therefore applied himself even more diligently. Three weeks later, he saw Amitabha in his golden body holding a golden dais coming for him saying, “Your vow is now accomplished.” The master thus put his palms together, sat in full lotus and was reborn. Heavenly music could be heard in space even though there was no one playing. People listened with great delight. One of the master’s disciples was an official. He

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was so moved by the experience that he composed a poem to commemorate the occasion. This is a true story that was recorded in the historical records.

*Question:* You advocate using the rebirth plaque Dharma to start accruing rebirth blessings now, and not wait until after death as is the current prevailing custom. However, if we have a lot of rebirth blessings, would that not shorten our life?

*Answer:* As the above anecdote about Dharma Master Mind Jade 懷玉 illustrates, having a lot of rebirth blessings will not necessarily shorten your life as some might fear. No one will force you to go before you are ready. And yes, I do think that for people who are blessed, they should take advantage of the unique Mahayana rebirth plaque Dharma in order to accumulate rebirth blessings because:

1. It would help make a better case for rebirth should they who have to meet with the judge, King Yama, at that time when they need to change bodies.
2. The more blessings one has, the higher one's rebirth grade will be.
3. This Dharma can help resolve the many obstructions for attaining rebirth to the Pure Land.

We have a student who is in his fifties who has been sincerely and faithfully making offerings to Orthodox Mahayana temples for over twenty years. He found out that he had colon cancer and must go under the knife. That is very bad news because it is a major surgery. Because his Orthodox Mahayana temples did not allow for rebirth plaques until after death, he came and requested a rebirth plaque from us saying,

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“I know that you advised us to get the rebirth plaque and I’ve always thought that I had time. Please help me accrue rebirth blessings just in case I don’t make it through surgery.” When he went under the knife a few weeks later, he survived surgery. However, he had to go to the intensive care unit and almost died. When he came back he recounted that, on the verge of death, his mind was totally chaotic. He saw a lot of frightening things. He also saw his Chinese Master and our temple Dharma protector watching over him in the background. You do not have to die before you are ready to use this Dharma.

Practice: Holding the Buddha’s name.

行則執持名號，一心不亂

Inadequate vow power will not lead to practice. Practice is like tossing the water-clearing pearl into the mud so that the muddy water becomes clear. When the Buddha’s name enters a confused mind, the confused mind becomes a Buddha mind. 清珠投于濁水，濁水不得不清；佛號投於亂心，亂心不得不佛也。 Practice can increase sincerity.

There are four methods of reciting the Buddha’s name:

1. Contemplating and thinking recitation (觀想念佛; from The Contemplation Sutra, also known as the 16 Contemplations Sutra): One popular practice is to contemplate the reward body as described in the Amitabha praise. The Contemplation Sutra lists sixteen successive contemplations.

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2. Contemplating a Buddha image recitation (觀像念佛; from the ban zhou san mèi jing 般舟三昧經): Select a statue of the Buddha that you like. Recite the Buddha's name while contemplating it.
3. Holding the name (持名念佛; suitable for a wider range of roots): This is by far the most widely practiced method. Keep reciting the Buddha's name to purify your mind and you can enter samadhi.
4. Real Mark Buddha recitation (實相念佛): When late Master Xuan Hua explained this, he said it is doing the hua tou such as, "Who is reciting the Buddha's name?" It confused me for quite a while. Later I understood differently. Real Mark recitation is what enlightened beings do when they recite the Buddha's name.

However, the Pure Land practice is not confined to the above methods. There also are:

5. Bowing (禮拜; the first of Universal Worthy Bodhi-sattva's ten limitless practices).
6. Making offerings (供養; the second and third of Universal Worthy's ten practices).
7. Repentance (悔; Universal Worthy's unlimited practices number 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10). This is described in chapter 40 of The Avatamsaka Sutra.

Ultimately, we practice reciting the Buddha's name in order to attain the "one mind unconfused" state; in other words, to obtain the Buddha recitation samadhi. If we can do this, then



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we will be assured of rebirth at the end of this lifetime.

Practice is of critical importance if you wish to be reborn.

Practice requires really putting in effort 力行 which can only follow deep faith and sincere vows.

These are the three requisites for the Pure land Dharma Door. They are like a three-legged bronze censor: missing any leg would not do.

Practice can have two aspects:

1. Phenomenon practice 事行.
2. Noumenon practice 理行.

The phenomenon practice belongs to phenomenon marks 事行屬於事相. We use the mind, as the subject 能, that can recite the Buddha's name, which is the object 所. Subject and object are clear and distinct 能所分明. When the mind and Buddha, subject and object, are in accord 相應, then the mind is not apart from Buddha 心不離佛, and Buddha is not apart from the mind. One is clearly aware of the recitation 念茲在茲, which is uninterrupted. Whether walking, standing, sitting or reclining, we are not apart from the Buddha's name. The concentrated mind dispels the false 專念去妄 like the frozen lake stops the water flow 使心如寒潭止水. Then the Buddha is like the Autumn moon shining in space—clear, brilliant and unmoving 湛然不動.

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We can thus enter samadhi. This state is described in the Han Shan poem 寒山詩:

*My mind is like the autumn moon* 吾心似秋月,  
*Or a green pool that is pure and clear* 碧潭清皎潔.  
*Nothing can compare* 無物堪比倫.  
*How can I express it* 教我如何說!

This state of recitation of the Buddha's name with one mind unconfused is like how one arm connects to the other arm through the chest. One holds the name in the mind without forgetting, to the point where no other thought arises. The Buddha's name follows in thought after thought with no other thought and without interruption 念念相續, 無雜無間. That is true vigor!

Notes to the advanced practitioners: Noumenon practice belongs to the principle nature 理行屬於理性. The mind that recites the Buddha's name neither dwells in existence nor falls into emptiness. It dwells and yet does not dwell 無住而住: it dwells in the Middle Way of the principle nature 住於中道之理性中. One awakens to and knows that outside the mind that can recite (subject), there is no Buddha that can be recited (object) 能念心外, 無有佛為我所念. Conversely outside the Buddha being recited 所念佛外, there is no mind that can recite 亦無有心能念佛. Both subject and object are extinguished 能所雙泯. Mind

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and Buddha are one Suchness 心佛一如. Mind is just Buddha 心即是佛, Buddha is just mind. There are no two marks, often described as non-dual 無有二相, and one understands that there is nothing to attach to 了無所著.

The ancients say:

*Suddenly the thought of Amitabha arises* 忽然念起彌陀佛;

*The ground is leveled, there is no wind, the wave arises by itself* 平地無風自作波;

*Thought after thought dissipates and returns to non-thought thoughts* 念念消歸無念念;

*Even knowing of non-thought is excessive* 豈知無念亦為多!

When you reach this state, there is a block of empty spiritual essence 一片空靈 and the principle nature reveals itself 理性自現.

The Three Essentials of Pure Land 淨土三要述義, a collection of Dharma talks by Luò Jì Hé 駱季和, classifies reciting the Buddha's name into:

1. Proper practice 正行 and
2. Aiding practice 助行.

There are eight kinds of Proper practice:

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1. Gathering in the mind recitation **攝心念**: This means to recite everywhere without forgetting, with no other thoughts; even in sleep one does not stop reciting.
2. Valiant recitation **勇猛念**: It is like being willing to give up one's life for an ideal, nothing can stop us.
3. Deep mind recitation **深心念**: Even though the ocean is quite deep, one must get to the bottom; the road to enlightenment seems so distant but one must get to the end without resting.
4. Contemplating and thinking recitation **觀想念**: In thought after thought, contemplate the 32 hallmarks and 80 subsidiary characteristics.
5. Extinguishing the mind recitation **息心念**: Recite the Buddha's name and extinguish the mind that seeks fame and profit, schemes for an official position, indulges in desires, engages in worldly pursuits, is greedy for love, is arrogant, likes to cover up, and discerns self and others, right and wrong.
6. Compassionate crying recitation **悲啼念**: Each time I think of the Buddha, my body hair stands on its end **身毛豎**, the five organs (**五臟** = **心** heart, **肝** liver, **脾** spleen, **肺** lung, and **腎** kidney) are torn **五內裂**. I remember how often I failed to carry my parents (meaning being filial) **如憶少背父母**, and now this wiser son really misses them **及多慧亡兒**. Make a vow to quickly succeed in your practice so that you

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can help those you loved, who already have passed on before you could help them.

7. Angry recitation 發憤念: To bring forth great determination arising from anger or disappointment. It is just like failing the Imperial Examination 科舉 for the civil service in Ancient China, and feeling left out in the cold 如落第孤寒. Because my talents are not recognized, I feel lonely and dejected 負才寂寞. My thoughts are oppressive and I become disenchanted with life 每一念及, 殆不欲生.
8. Universal recitation 一切念: Seeing, hearing, awakening and knowing 見聞覺知, within the hair pores, bones and marrow 毛孔骨髓, nowhere is not reciting Buddha's name 無一處不念佛. Reciting like this 如此念佛, deserves to be called pure recitation 方謂淨念.

As for aiding practices, there are six kinds:

1. Pure virtues 淨德: Besides reciting the Buddha's name, we should also do good and plant blessings which we dedicate to the Western Pure Land.
2. Pure precepts 淨戒: All the pure Dharmas rely on the pure precepts. Before entering Nirvana, the Buddha reminded his disciples to take the precepts as their teacher. The Contemplation Sutra states that among the cultivation of the three blessings, purely observing

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precepts and maintaining awesome comportment rank at the top.

3. Pure repentance 淨懺: The sutra says “the previous mind that commits offenses is like clouds covering the sky; the ensuing mind that eradicates the offenses is like the torch that dispels the darkness.” There is inner repentance 內懺, outer repentance 外懺, phenomenon repentance 事懺, noumenon repentance 理懺 etc...
4. Pure contemplation 淨觀: Besides reciting the Buddha’s name, one should use the Contemplation Dharmas to burnish the mind, purifying it. There is contemplation of the impure 不淨觀, curative contemplation 對治觀, shame and remorse contemplation 慚愧觀, kindness and compassion contemplation 慈悲觀 and others.
5. Pure place 淨處: We recite the Buddha’s name in order to escape the dusts. Therefore we should detest evil places and seek good places that are suitable for practice. We should distance ourselves from noisy, crowded, tumultuous places, avoid entertainment and drinking places, and sever the bonds of favors and love.
6. Pure companion 淨侶: True potential cannot be realized without companions; evil dharmas cannot be stopped without a friend. It is like a two-wheeled cart: lacking one wheel will render it useless. Draw near companions who treasure pure places like in the moun-

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tains, who strictly observe precepts, whose wisdom is deep and vast, who are humble, modest, patient etc... Distance from evil companions lest the mind for the Way will be harmed or lost.

One who practices the recitation Dharma Door but has not yet purified one's mind will encounter ten kinds of obstructions:

1. One has inadequate faith 信之不篤.
2. One's practice is not valiant 行之不勇.
3. One's vows are not sincere 發願不切.
4. One's mind is afflicted 悠悠默念.
5. One's mind is attached to worldly affairs 心緣世事.
6. One's mind harbors love and hate 愛憎不除.
7. One has bad friends and believes in the externalist scriptures 旁及外籍.
8. One is enamored with singing and chanting 耽著吟詠.
9. One indulges in leisure and frivolous speech 閒講雜話.
10. There is no pure practice that can make one's mind unconfused 無一心不亂之靜功 if one is not resolved to be vigorous and attain certification 無立意剋期取證.

According to the Bodhisattva Jué Míng Miào Hèng 覺明妙

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恆行菩薩, in the upper grade recitation:

1. Originally the mind has no thought 心本無念.  
Thought follows examination 念逐想生, which is the recognition or processing of data obtained from the sensory organs. This examination is false and creates the causes for the revolution in the wheel.
2. The phrase “Amitabha does not arise from examination” 不從想起, does not owe its existence to thought 不從念有, does not dwell inside or outside 不住內外, has no mark or appearance 無有相貌 and is just the end of all false thinking 即是盡諸妄想.
3. All the Buddhas’ true bodies 真實之身 are pure 清淨, subtle and wonderful 微妙, neither one nor two 非一非二, and cannot be discerned 不可分別.
4. Those who can recite like this cannot be turned or interrupted by afflictions and dusts 塵勞. They can stop this one (conscious) mind 止是一心 and will certainly obtain single-mindedness 必得一心.
5. This can be called maintaining the Buddha’s name 方得名為執持名號, or one mind unconfused 一心不亂. Our pure karma is accomplished 淨業功成 and we will go straight to the upper grade 直趣上品.
6. Such recitation can also be called:



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- a. Pure recitation 清淨念. It is done with the purest possible mindset.
- b. Thoroughly clear recitation 明徹念. The mind clearly recites the Buddha's name and is not scattered.
- c. Bright and radiant recitation 光耀念. This is so called because wisdom has come forth.
- d. Real Mark recitation 實相念. This is the truest form of recitation.
- e. Perfectly harmonious recitation 圓融念. We can recite with a mind that is all embracing and does not reject anyone.
- f. No discrimination recitation 無分別念. The reciting mind is free from discrimination. The conscious mind's working is suspended.
- g. Leaving the dusts recitation 離塵念. If we can recite at this level, we will certainly be able to be reborn to the Land of Utmost Bliss and escape the dusts.
- h. Inconceivable recitation 不思議念. The benefits of this level of recitation are simply inconceivable.
- i. Primary meaning ultimate truth recitation 第一義畢諦念. This type of recitation is in accord with the principles taught by the Buddhas.

In summary, the three requisites of the Pure Land Dharma Door are:

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1. Faith. One should have faith:
  - a. Especially in the Buddha's wisdom and vow power.
  - b. In oneself: we are very blessed to encounter this Mahayana Pure Land Dharma.
  - c. That the Pure Land Dharma can help us quickly escape birth and death.
2. Vows. One should make vast vows:
  - a. To marshal resources.
  - b. To control one's destiny.
  - c. Such vows act as a lifeline, lifetime after lifetime.
3. Practice. One should vigorously practice to certify to the faith:
  - a. To improve the rebirth grade.
  - b. To develop the recitation samadhi.
  - c. To help others.

### Discussing the function

Let us discuss the sutra's power and its use. This sutra has the power to give us the status of non-retreating. And its use is to help living beings obtain rebirth.

As the sages taught, Arhats have the "confusion with dwelling in the womb" while Bodhisattvas have the "splitting the yin" confusion. Unless they can meet with a Good Knowing Adviser, then life after life they retreat and find it very hard to bring forth the Bodhi mind. It is very easy to regress.

There are four kinds of non-retreating:

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1. In position 位, or in attainment: This means one will not fall back to the lesser position of ordinary men. This is from being able to bring along karmas with re-birth to the Common and Sagely Cohabiting Pure Land.
2. In conduct 行: One will not regress in the Dharma practiced. One is reborn to the Pure Land of Expedients with Residues and will never regress to the state of confusion of ordinary people.
3. In thoughts 念: There is no retreating on proper thoughts. One is reborn to the Actual Reward Adornment Pure Land and will never regress to the state of the Two Vehicles.
4. Ultimate non-retreating 究竟: Hearing the Buddha's name just once, whether with concentration or a scattered mind, with belief or not, with understanding or not, it will be stored in the Alaya consciousness forever and create the seeds for future liberation. When all ignorance is ended, one can certify to ultimate non-retreating and be reborn to the Permanently Still and Bright Pure Land.

All inhabitants of the four kinds of Pure Lands can obtain non-retreating. Let us look at these four types of Pure Lands in greater detail:

1. Common and Sagely Cohabiting 梵聖同居土:  
Common refers to those who have not yet ended view and thought delusions. Sagely refers to the First to Third stage Arhats. They cohabit without distinction. Although there are the god and human realms, the oth-

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er four “evil” paths are not present. Even the externalists and heavenly demons all have entered the proper samadhi and not the deviant samadhi.

In brief, those whose level is below the Fourth Stage Arhat are born into this type of Pure Land 若執持名號，未斷見思，隨其或散或定。

2. Expedients with Residues 方便有餘土: The residents of this kind of Pure Land have ended view and thought delusions but have not yet ended delusions like motes of dusts. They have obtained one mind unconfused phenomenon (phenomenon refers to the Buddha’s recitation mark).

This is where the Arhats and Pratyekabuddhas are born into 若持至事一心不亂，見思任運先落。

3. Actual Reward Adorned 實報莊嚴土: The residents here have attained one mind unconfused noumenon. They have destroyed up to 41 grades of ignorance. Noumenon refers to the principles: mind is Buddha, there is no Buddha outside of the mind, reciting and yet not reciting, still and unmoving.

Bodhisattvas are born here 若至理一心不亂，豁破無明一品，乃至四十一品。

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4. Permanently Still Brilliance 常寂光土: This is the Buddha's Nirvana.

Except for the last one, each type of Pure Land has nine grades of rebirth. Though there are four types of Pure Land, none of these are outside of the mind. The Western Bliss Pure Land contains all four of these types of Pure Lands.

### **Determining the teaching (type)**

The teaching of this sutra belongs to the Sutra division and the Bodhisattva Vehicle that is the Mahayana or Full Word Teaching as opposed to the Hinayana, which is also known as the Two Vehicles or Half Word Teaching.

Using deduction, this sutra cannot belong to the Avatamsaka, Agama, Prajna and Lotus periods because it does cross over all three types of roots: dull, middle and superior. Therefore it belongs to the Vaipulya period. But it contains the perfect and sudden principles.

This sutra belongs to the Spoken without request division. It was because none of the Buddha's disciples had enough wisdom to request the Pure Land teaching. Therefore, it was spoken without being requested.

Another important characteristic about this sutra is that it will be the last one to disappear. First the Shurangama Sutra will become extinct because no one will believe in its authenticity. Without it, no one can recite the Shurangama mantra. Then one by one, the other sutras will disappear. The words simply will vanish from the sutra text pages. The Amitabha Sutra

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will be the last one to disappear. It will remain in the world for the last hundred years and cross over countless living beings. During this period, living beings who recite this sutra once will obtain rebirth. After that, only the phrase “Na Mo Amitabha Buddha” will remain and it will save limitless living beings: the phrase will appear in the sky but living beings’ karmic offenses will be so heavy that they will not dare to recite it; those who will be able to recite it just once, will obtain rebirth. Next, only “Amitabha Buddha” will remain for another hundred years, rescuing limitless living beings. Afterwards, the Buddhadharma will be extinct.

There are three kinds of delusions:

1. Of thoughts and views 見思惑, also called delusions of “I don’t see.”
2. Like dust and sand 塵沙惑, also called delusions of “I don’t know” (no genuine knowledge).
3. Of ignorance 無明惑. The Bodhisattvas at the stage of Equal Enlightenment still have one portion of production-mark ignorance 一分生相無明. Once it is destroyed, they can realize the Wonderful Enlightenment of the Buddhas.

View delusions refer to greed and love for externals. They are not recognized as empty but as real. There are 88 kinds of view delusions. View delusions contain the Five Quick Servants 利史 which are:

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1. View of a body 身見: One does not understand that the body is falsely united from causes and conditions. It is intrinsically empty.
2. View of extremes 邊見: One believes in permanence (e.g. to believe that “once a cow always a cow”) or nihilism (to believe that everything returns to emptiness upon death; so live it up and commit offenses because it carries no consequences).
3. Deviant views 邪見: One does not believe in cause and effect. There are even many who not only deny cause and effect, also urge others to also deny it. These folks will certainly fall to the hells and have virtually no chance of rebirth to the Pure Lands.
4. Views of restrictive morality 戒取見: Taking a non-existent cause for cause. Many externalist practitioners follow restrictive rules of morality that are nonsense, claiming that such conduct will ensure birth to better realms. For example, some Hindu practitioner opened his Heavenly Eye. He then saw a dog being born to the heavens upon death and mistakenly assumed that emulating the behavior of dogs is a method for assuring rebirth to the heavens. He therefore advocated adopting the rules of conduct of canines. Followers of this sect do not realize that heavenly births are caused by practicing the Ten Good Deeds.
5. Views of grasping at views 見取見: Taking a non-existent effect for an effect. There is the well known case of the Unlearned Bhikshu. He reached Fourth Dhyana where even subtle thoughts are ended. He therefore thought that he attained Arhatship. At death,

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he saw his consciousness leave the body and slandered the Buddha for having misled him about the Arhat's having transcended birth and death. In other words, he was confused about "effect", falsely assuming that he had reached a state that he really did not. As a result of slandering the Buddha, the Unlearned Bhikshu obtained a first class ticket to the hells where he underwent unspeakable torture and suffering.

Thought delusions result from making discriminations because one is confused about the principles. There are 81 kinds. They contain the Five Slow Servants 頓使:

1. Greed: One wants more good things.
2. Hatred: One is prone to getting angry.
3. Stupidity: One is confused about the principles.
4. Pride: Arrogance seems to be the most common affliction of the modern times.
5. Doubt: One is skeptical about the true principles but readily believes in deviant teachings.

At the age of 19 years the Buddha left home, when he was 29 years old he became enlightened, and when he has 80 years old he entered Nirvana. The years between his awakening and his entrance into Nirvana can be divided into five teaching periods.

1. Avatamsaka period: Taught by the Buddha in the first twenty-one days after his awakening (Perfect teaching).
2. Agama period: Expounded in twelve years (Store teaching).



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3. Vaipulya period: Which took eight years for the Buddha to teach(Connective teaching).
4. Vajra period: Was transmitted in twenty-two years (Separate teaching).
5. Dharma Flower – Nirvana period: Which required eight years (Perfect teaching).

The twelve divisions/categories 部 are:

1. Prose lines 長行: These are regular sentences.
2. Verse lines 重頌: Which serve as repetition of the meanings presented in prose lines.
3. Prediction of Buddhahood 授記: The Buddha gives a prediction of Buddhahood saying that in a certain number of kalpas in the future, so and so will become a Buddha with a certain name, his land will be so called, etc.
4. Interjections 孤起: These do not fit with the principles before and after. The short verses in the Vajra Sutra are such examples.
5. Spoken without request 無問而自說: The Buddha normally does not dispense the teachings until he is requested. However, there are some cases where he chooses to teach without being requested because his disciples are not capable of making the request.
6. Causes and conditions 因緣: They expound on the law of cause and effect.
7. Analogies 譬喻: The Buddha is the master of using analogies to illustrate his points, making it easier to understand the profound principles.

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8. Past events **本事**: These are events in the lives of the Buddha's disciples.
9. Past lives **本生**: These are events that happened in the Buddha's past lives.
10. Universal writings **方廣**: To explain the principles in an especially expansive fashion.
11. Not previously existent **未曾有**: This pertains to the new sutras not yet explained up to that point in time.
12. Commentaries **論議**: These are comments of the enlightened disciples of the Buddha.

The Chinese verse for the 12 divisions follows:

長行重頌並授記  
孤起無問而自說  
因緣譬喻及本事  
本生方廣未曾有  
論議共成十二部

The distinguishing characteristic of the Pure Land school is that it enables living beings to horizontally transcend the Three Realms and bring their karma along with them to the Pure Land. All other Dharma Doors require one to transcend vertically, which is not easy. Here is an analogy: imagine a worm that is trapped inside a stalk of bamboo, trying to climb to the top by eating its way through all the successive joints, which are the hardest part of the bamboo. This symbolizes the high degree of difficulty in increasing samadhi power. However, if the worm cuts out of the bamboo horizontally

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and then climbs to the top from outside, symbolizing rebirth to the Pure Land, it is much easier.

The Pure Land Dharma Door is wonderful because it is:

1. Very easy to learn: There is no need to memorize, contemplate etc.
2. Very secure: Upholding the Buddha's name will result in having the Buddha being mindful of you. If one can reach the recitation with one mind unconfused, at the end of life, one will get the Buddha's help. In one lifetime in the Pure Land, one can attain Buddhahood. There is no need to go back to the sea of birth and death.
3. The faster track: If you are not enlightened this lifetime, you will be when you are reborn to the Pure Land.

This Dharma Door is appropriate for the superior roots, such as Manjusri and Universal Worthy Bodhisattvas who both vowed to be reborn there, the middle roots, such as those of the Two Vehicles, and the inferior roots, such as common mortals.

The Buddhadharma relies on left-home people for its transmission. Another name commonly used for left-home people is sramana or shramana. There are four kinds of sramanas:

1. Certifying to the Way 聖道 Sramanas: These are the sages of all three Vehicles.
2. Teaching the Way 說道 Sramanas: They teach the Dharma to benefit living beings.

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3. Living the Way 活道 Sramanas: They specialize in holding precepts.
4. Defiling the Way 汙道 Sramanas: They like to break precepts.

Once there was a blacksmith. He had a hard time feeding his family of four: himself, his wife, his son and daughter. One day without work would not bring enough food to the table. He blamed himself for not cultivating in prior lives. That is why this lifetime, he was so poor and destitute. A sramana walked by one day and was invited in for some tea. The blacksmith requested to be transmitted the Dharma. He needed something that he could practice that would not get in the way of his work. The monk taught him the recitation of the Buddha's name Dharma. So, every time he primed his fan, and every time he blew it, he would recite "Amitabha." The same for every time he wielded the hammer to hit the steel implements. He thus maintained the Buddha's name his entire life hoping that at the end of his life, the Buddha would come to escort him back to the Pure Land. His wife asked him, "Why go through all the trouble?" He said that he no longer felt the heat from the oven when he recited, his arm was no longer sore from hitting with the hammer, and at night he even slept better. Years afterwards, he one day told his wife that he wanted to return home. "Where to?" asked the wife. "To the west," he replied. He was still at work by the furnace but recited more loudly. The room was filled with a wonderful fragrance and there was heavenly music as he left.

Another story: there was a butcher who specialized in selling beef. Towards the end of his life, he dreamed of multitudes

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of cattle coming for him. He asked his wife to ask for help from the sangha. A hé shàng was called who came and told them that his killing karma was very heavy, and that only by reciting the Buddha's name could he receive help. The butcher recited along with the monk. After a while, the (cattle) ghosts left. He continued to recite more earnestly and saw the Buddha come to greet him. He was reborn in the Pure Land.

To attain the state of “one mind unconfused” is to enter the Buddha recitation samadhi. This is proper concentration. The ancients call this Dharma Door “unsurpassed profound and wonderful Chan.”

## SUTRA PREFACE

### *Sutra Text:*

**Thus I have heard, at one time the Buddha dwelt at Shravasti, in the Jeta Grove in the Garden of the Benefactor of Orphans and the Solitary, together with a gathering of Great Bhikshus, twelve hundred fifty in all, all Great Arhats well-known to the assembly: Elders Shariputra, Mahamaudgalyayana, Mahakasyapa, Mahakatyayana, Mahakausthila, Revata, Suddhipanthaka, Nanda, Ananda, Rahula, Gavampati, Pindola-Bharadvaja, Kalodayin, Mahakaphina, Vakkula, Aniruddha, and others such as these, all Great Disciples, together with all the Bodhisattvas, Mahasattvas: Manjushri, Prince of Dharma; Ajita Bodhisattva, Gandhastin Bodhisattva, Nityodukta Bodhisattva, and others such as these, all Great Bodhisattvas, and together with Shakra, Chief among Gods, and the numberless great multitudes from all the heavens.**

### *Sutra Commentary:*

**Thus I have heard, at one time the Buddha dwelt at Shravasti, in the Jeta Grove in the Garden of the Benefactor of Orphans and the Solitary,**

Sutras are traditionally aggregated into three major sections:

1. Preface 序分:

From the start until: ...together with Shakra, Chief among Gods, and the numberless great multitudes from all the heavens. 及釋提桓因等，無量諸

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天大眾俱。

2. Proper text 正宗分:

Until: ...for the entire world proclaim this Dharma which is difficult to believe, extremely difficult! 為一切世間說此難信之法，是為甚難。

3. Circulation 流通分:

From: After the Buddha spoke this sutra 佛說此經已 until the end.

The preface can also be called “Afterword” because it was added later during the sutra compilations. It usually describes the arising of the teachings and provides certification. It sets the stage for the Proper Text section which contains the main doctrine. After hearing the principles contained in the teachings, the Assembly obtained great benefits. Therefore the Buddha typically closes with the circulation section, urging us to put what we can understand into practice and widely circulate the sutra so that others can also obtain benefits.

The preface of this sutra does not contain the reasons for the teachings. However, six requirements or realizations 成就 are fulfilled:

1. Faith: **Thus**. This denotes stillness.
2. Hearer: **I have heard**. I heard it from the Buddha’s mouth myself; referring to the false self manifested by Bodhisattvas.
3. Time: **at one time**. The sutra was spoken when conditions matured; intrinsically the time is not definite.

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4. Host: **the Buddha**, which is Sanskrit for the enlightened being: he enlightens himself, enlightens others and perfects enlightenment.
5. Place: **Shravasti, in the Jeta Grove in the Garden of the Benefactor of Orphans and the Solitary.**
6. Audience: **a gathering of Great Bhikshus.**

These six elements certify that this sutra was truly spoken by the Buddha.

Most Buddhist sutras begin with “**Thus I have heard** 如是我聞.” This was added later by Ven. Ananda when he committed the Buddha’s teachings into written form. Originally, the Golden Immortal (as the Buddha is often referred to) only gave sermons. His disciples used to tell each other from memory. They later chose to write them down to ensure accuracy, certification and ease of propagation.

When the Buddha was about to enter Nirvana, Ven. Ananda asked him how he should begin the Buddhist sutras. The Buddha told him to start with “Thus I have heard.” Later, when Ven. Ananda started transcribing the Buddha’s sutras, he remembered the Buddha’s instructions 遵佛旨 and added this phrase.

At that time, the externalist scriptures either started with “A 阿” or “Ou 憂” meaning respectively “non-existence 無” or “existence 有.” “Non-existence” refers to the externalist’s highest state of emptiness, which is still far from the Hinayana Buddhist understanding of emptiness. None of them could explain True Emptiness and Wonderful Existence.



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Therefore, the phrase “Thus I have heard” differentiates the Buddhist scriptures from externalist scriptures.

Furthermore, the phrase serves the purpose of resolving the doubts of the Assembly. When Ven. Ananda ascended the Dharma seat to speak the Dharma, he looked so much like the Buddha that people gave rise to three types of reactions:

1. Some thought that Shakyamuni came back to life because Ven. Ananda was nearly identical in appearance to the Buddha.
2. Some suspected that another Buddha came to speak Dharma.
3. Some assumed that Ven. Ananda already realized Buddhahood.

Starting out with this phrase thus avoided these confusions by affirming that these are Shakyamuni’s teachings.

### ***First Realization***

**Thus** comes from the Chinese 如是:

1. 如 means not different 不異. This is “exactly” what the Buddha said. This is exactly what I heard the Buddha say. The hearing mind is not different from the Buddha and vice versa, the Buddha is not different from the mind. It also denotes stillness: the 10,000 Dharmas, an expression meaning “all things”, are still 萬法俱寂. The mind is unconfused.
2. 是 means not false 無非. Mind and Buddha are one;

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the same substance 心佛無非一體. In fact, mind is Buddha 是心是佛, mind can be Buddha 是心作佛.

3. You should thus follow the teaching and read, recite, make offerings and cultivate. Do not deviate from the teachings thus expounded.
4. Usually the teaching is explained because it was requested. Someone asked and the Buddha thus responded to instruct according to the listeners' potential. Cultivators in the future should thus also answer when requested for instructions. This sutra, however, is an exception as it was not requested.
5. Afterwards, you should thus follow and thus cultivate. If others ask, you should thus answer: that was thus spoken, that was what I thus heard.

“Thus” certifies the faith aspect: these teachings can be believed in.

The Dharma Flower Sutra states that the Buddhas accomplish the ultimate which only Buddhas can fathom. All dharmas thus have such marks, such nature, such substance, such power, such cause, such effect, such retribution, such conditions, etc... The World Honored Ones thus only speak of the marks, nature, principles etc.

## **Second Realization**

The “I” in the phrase “I have heard” is what Ven. Ananda

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calls himself. Ordinary people mistakenly attach to the false self, believing that there is a self 妄執實我, and become greedy for worldly pleasures. The more advanced the civilizations become, the more likely they are to revere the culture of the ego. However, at the time that Ven. Ananda recorded this sutra, he had already become a Fourth Stage Arhat (usually referred to as Arhat for brevity). He is no longer attached to the (ordinary person's) false self or body made from the union of the four great elements: earth, wind, fire and water 四大妄身. Nor does he grasp at the externalists' spiritual self 神我 (one of the higher types of awakening of the externalists arising from attaining the heights of the eight samadhis). Ven. Ananda no longer has a self and only refers to himself as "I" in order to accord with the worldly customary address: that is the spirit of the Middle Way.

*Question:* The Buddhas speak Dharma to eliminate attachment to the self. Why not use "No one 無我"? Why even use "I heard"?

*Answer:* There are four reasons:

1. For the sake of convenience. If we use "No one" then we open ourselves to criticism: who knows this sutra in this world of ours?
2. To accord with the worldly convention of address.
3. To eliminate "no self": if there is no self, who is there to come and listen to the sutra?
4. "I" denotes the existence of self and others, defiled and pure, cause and effect, phenomenon and karma etc...

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*Question:* In that case, why not use his name, Ananda instead of “I”?

*Answer:* There are three meanings for “I”:

1. To avoid conflicting with the mundane 示不乖俗.  
The Buddha wishes to reveal the Truth but does not wish to contradict the mundane. The principles may be subtle and wonderful but the terminology is not in conflict with the mundane. This reaffirms that the Truth is not apart from the Mundane 真諦不離俗.
2. “I” denotes being in control and self-mastery 主宰自在之義. The biography of the Treasure Compilation 集藏傳 says that there are three Anandas 阿難: a) Ananda 阿難陀。云慶喜。持聲聞藏, who maintains the Sound Hearer Vehicle Treasury. b) Ananbhadrā 阿難跋陀。云喜賢。持獨覺藏, who maintains the Pratyekabuddha Treasury. And c) Ānandasāgara 阿難伽羅。云喜海。持菩薩藏, who maintains the Bodhisattva Vehicle Treasury. There is actually only one individual, and he is called differently as per each particular virtue. He is vastly erudite, remembers and maintains what he hears, accumulates the three wisdoms and has obtained great self-mastery towards the Three Treasuries. To mention his name would be correct but would fail to convey the notion of his having already obtained self-mastery toward all dharmas.

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3. Me personally. Customarily, when people say “I hear”, it serves as personal certification. To say that “Ananda heard” would be deprived of such personal quality and could even be construed as hearsay (heard from someone else). It therefore eliminates any potential doubt about the veracity. The ear organ gives rise to the hearing consciousness.

“Have heard 聞” denotes that Ven. Ananda personally heard this from the Buddha’s Golden Mouth with his own ears. Don’t worry: for those sutras that the World-Honored-One spoke when Ven. Ananda was not around, the Buddha already used his spiritual penetrations to repeat them to Ven. Ananda. Ven. Ananda has photographic memory: once the Buddha’s sermon entered his ears, he would never forget. That is why he was later put in charge of compiling of the Buddhist sutras. We should be grateful to him for using his literary wisdom to maintain the Pure Land Dharma 以聞慧，聞持淨土無障礙法門.

Why did he say “heard”? The ear organ alone is used to represent all the other sensory organs as well because Ven. Ananda was constantly by the Buddha’s side. Clearly, he had the chance to observe and be awakened to the teachings. The hearing aspect is stated because:

1. In order to certify to the profound principles, we must start with hearing 欲證深理、要先聞法: we must invest time to study and investigate the principles (erudition).
2. Our Saha world relies on sound for the Dharma

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propagation.

3. To certify to Bodhi, one needs time to let the principles we heard (and read, came into contact with, had the flavor of, pondered about, etc...) permeate, become our second nature and blossom 希證菩提要聞熏習。由聞熏習、成出世故。

When the Buddha was about to enter Nirvana, Ven. Ananda was then only a First Stage Arhat. He was very upset and cried bitterly. Ven. Anirudha 阿冕樓駄 told him, “You should have some control! The Buddha is leaving. It is our last chance to ask for instructions. You should go and ask for his final instructions.”

Ven. Ananda collected himself, came and asked the World Honored One for advice. He was told to use the phrase “Thus I have heard” at the start of a sutra, years before the sutras were culled. The Buddha also told Ananda three more things:

1. After the Buddha’s departure, all his disciples must take the Pratimoksha 波羅提木叉 (which can be translated as precepts 戒) as their teacher. They should refrain from doing evil, do only good and try to help others.
2. To deal with the evil bhikshus who refuse to cultivate and only wish to obstruct others’ cultivation, not by arguing with them, but just by silently expelling them 默擯. This is so appropriate for this day and age when people like to engage in arguments and quarrels to prove their righteousness!

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3. Buddhist disciples should dwell in the four stations of mindfulness. Doing so will help them attain the Way.

The four stations of mindfulness 四念處 are:

1. To contemplate the body as impure 此身以業識為因。父母為緣。和合而成。 In particular, our bodily secretions are quite unclean. After I left the home-life, I discovered that we were not supposed to bathe every day like I used to. Left-home people only bathe every two weeks or so. You know, every day we would stand next to each other in the Buddha Hall by those bowing cushions. Some people's bodies can be quite disconcerting, especially to the lay visitors to the temple! Amazingly, the body odor gradually lessened with the practice!
2. To contemplate feelings as suffering 惟有念佛。往生西方。是真快樂。 Feelings arise when we come into contact with the external world. Remember when you first came out of the womb? That first contact with the air was rather painful. That is why children cry when they are born. It should serve as a premonition of what is to come: a lot of pain and suffering!

Some may object and say that they are quite content and often happy with their life. Wait until you run into difficulty or when bad things happen and see what it is like. In fact, even happy people are suffering a form of subtle affliction: they are afraid of suffering and are

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quite full of themselves seeing how the rest of us have to struggle so much! Regardless, even those who are not full of themselves in this way, are still subject to illness and aging and are terrified of death. They can get medical help for illnesses and cosmetic surgery to tamper with their looks. But they cannot do much about death.

3. To contemplate thoughts as impermanent. Not only thoughts, but also the body, feelings and dharmas are impermanent. Thoughts arise and pass away like waves. They come and go continually. They help point out to us the impermanence of life: nothing remains the same, including love and beauty. Why do we feel so nostalgic about the past, often daydream about the future and desperately cling on to the pleasant moments?

The Vajra Sutra says, “Past thoughts cannot be obtained, present thoughts cannot be obtained, and future thoughts cannot be obtained 過去心不可得, 現在心不可得, 未來心不可得. Why attach to the unobtainable?”

4. To contemplate dharmas as devoid of self. There is no subject nor object 愚人執身為我。餘皆我所. Dharmas refer to all things, as conceived by our mind. Everything is a product of the mind. Everything comes about through causes and conditions. For example, we come into being through the union of our parents. We obtain a human body because we planted



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the causes for it, such as by observing the five precepts. Our parents simply are the conditions to bring about our existence; perhaps they owed us money in past lives so now they must rear us, pay for our car and college etc...

Everything is driven by cause and effect. In Buddhism, we explain this as “all dharmas lack self”: they have no self-nature, meaning their existence depends on other factors.

*Question:* I can sit in full lotus for an hour. Then it becomes excruciatingly painful. I noticed that you can sit in full lotus for hours on end without moving. Can you teach me how?

*Answer:* Continue to sit. Try to sit longer gradually. I’m teaching you to learn to bear the pain in the legs, back, shoulders, ankles, waist etc... Very few Chan teachers teach this way any more. Our training method is quite a bit more intensive. If you can endure the pain, then you discover things that others cannot understand. If you really want to know, you must do as you are told. It is a test of sincerity and faith. Once you pass these tests, you will understand and the pain stops. There are many ways to conquer the pain. The best one is to endure it! Be patient!

Again the phrase “thus I have heard” is introduced to the beginning of sutras in order to make the listeners “believe” and “accord with the teachings” 令眾生生信順. The Great Wisdom shastra 智度論 says: faithfully accept and carry out instruction 信受奉行 and wisdom is produced

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生智. Faith allows one to enter the Way 信為能入.  
Wisdom enables one to rescue living beings 智為能度.  
Faith is the basis for entering the Dharma 信為入法之所  
基. Wisdom is the ultimate profound awakening 智為究竟  
之玄術. Because of faith the spoken principles are  
followed 信則所言之理順. Because the instructions are  
followed therefore both the teacher and pupil accomplish  
their karma of the Way 順則師資之道成. Because of  
faith, the Dharma that was spoken can be accorded with.  
That is to say, it can be followed and executed 由信、故所  
說之法皆可順從. Because the Dharma is accorded with,  
the speaker and listener, teacher and disciple, can be worthy  
由順、故說聽二徒師資建立.

Faith is of utmost importance because of the following aspects:

1. Faith is the initial cause for the ultimate fruition 趣極  
果之初因: We start out by bringing forth the faith  
for Bodhi. That great mind takes the goodness root as  
substance, good companions as favorable conditions  
and not retreating or quitting as strategy, enabling us to  
purify ourselves and vigorously proceed with great  
determination.
2. Faith is the (hidden) basis for entering the principles  
入諦理之基漸. All the shastras state that in order  
to enter the sagely positions, one needs the faith root

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- 信根 and faith power 信力. Because we have the faith roots, the 10,000 good causes are produced. Because we have the faith power, the four kinds of demons: heavenly, death, sickness and affliction demons, cannot defeat and subdue us.
3. Faith enables us to penetrate the certification of the purity of the Wonderful Truth 通妙真之證淨 because it can help us escape the evil paths by avoiding the causes for poverty and lowly stations. Those who attain sagehood obtain indestructible faith. Because of faith in the Triple jewel, we will not fall into the three evil paths. Because we believe in the precepts, we avoid the causes for poverty and lowly stations.
  4. Faith acts as the superior clothes for ultimate virtue 荷至德之嘉依: The shastra 毗婆沙論 says faith is the clever hand that picks up the Dharma flavored food 食法味之嘉手. The person who studies the Buddhadharma is like the great dragon elephant 大龍象, taking faith as the paws 以信為手, renunciation as the ivory tusks 以捨為牙, mindfulness as the neck 以念為頸, and wisdom as the head 以慧為頭. The great dragon elephant shoulders and accrues good dharmas. When elephants eat, they must use their nose as a hand. That is why cultivators must first bring forth the faith.
  5. Faith is the primordial womb for the seven sagely

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assets 聖七財之元胎: It is the seat of origin of all the Dharma jewels. The seven sagely assets are: faith, precepts, erudition, renunciation, wisdom, shame and remorse 信戒聞捨慧慚愧. Faith is the mother of them all.

6. Faith is the initial place for the eight good causes 善八因之俶落 that result in: 1) Lifespan 壽: long, e.g. from not killing. 2) Form 色: body, e.g. from making offerings of food, lamps etc... 3) Caste 種姓: lineage, e.g. for being apart from arrogance. 4) Self-mastery 自在: not lacking; e.g. from generously making offerings. 5) Trustworthy words 信言: avoiding the four evil mouth karmas. 6) Great power 大力: to create great merit and virtue, make great vows. 7) Hero 丈夫: to speak the dharma of great men. And 8) power 力: to give one's best to assist others. These eight good causes are the basis for the good dharmas. The shastra 瑜伽論 says that, in order to enter the good dharmas, you need to take desire as a basis 欲為根本 because desire can form hope 起希望故. Desire is produced by forming the thought 作意所生 of wishing to awaken 數警覺故, arisen from contact and strengthened by repeated contact 觸所集起. This is because the mind tends to attach to the pleasant feelings induced by contact with

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external states 和心心所對勝緣故; 受所引攝  
anchoring the feelings in the mind 領在心故.

Desire is increased by samadhi 定為增上 the mind  
is settled and still 心澄寂故, refined by wisdom 慧  
為最勝 (one can discern good and evil 擇善惡故),  
strengthened by liberation 解脫為堅固 :it can sever  
the bonds of attachment 息纏縛故, and  
accomplished by escaping 出離為後邊 :we realize  
the fruitions 覺道滿故. At the outset, faith brings  
on the desire to awaken, therefore faith must arise first.

7. Faith is the remarkable hand that opens the door of  
opportunity 啟機門之勝手; it is the hand that picks  
up the teachings 攝教手也. The shastra 俱舍論  
says that one hand pulls living beings from birth and  
death and the mud. Here, speaking the proper Dharma  
is called the Buddhist hand 拔眾生出生死泥。  
陳正宗為佛教手. Making them believe is called  
the other living beings hand 序令生信為眾生手.  
Both hands work together to gather living beings out  
of the mud 兩手相攝出淤泥故. The Great  
Wisdom shastra 智度論 says that it is like a man  
who goes to the treasure mountain. He can pick up  
what he pleases with his hands; without hands he  
brings nothing back. Similarly, the faithful who enter  
the Buddha's treasure mountain will obtain the

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fruits of the Way. Those lacking faith, even though they understand the words and principles, will obtain nothing.

8. Faith is the pearl that clarifies the mind water 湛心水之清珠, because it purifies the mind. The shastra 成唯識云 says that faith, like the water clarifying pearl which can make the turbid water clear, can cure non-believers' confusion and turbidity 信如水精珠、能清濁水。能治不信性渾濁故。
9. Faith is the great means to establish reputation and a following 建名道之良資. If people lack faith, not much can be established 人無信不立. It is like a car without a steering mechanism: how can it go anywhere? Therefore, before starting out, we must give rise to faith.
10. We must use a very sincere treatment 款哀誠之佳待. If one has faith, one can use the weeds in the stream and pond, or algae and ferns, to make dishes to offer to ghosts and spirits, to princes and dukes. How much more to nobly make an alliance, which is faith based between two countries.

Of the above ten, the first eight rely on the truth of emptiness while the remaining two depend on the mundane truth.

## **Third Realization**

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We have just discussed the first two realizations: faith and hearer. The third realization is time. In this sutra, it is denoted by the phrase **at one time**. Sutras do not clearly spell out the exact time when they were spoken. This is because:

1. The Buddha speaks sutras all over: sometimes in the human realm, sometimes in the heavens. In the heavens, a day and night could be equivalent to 1,000 years in the human realm.
2. In the human realm there are further distinctions such as lunar, western or Mayan calendars.
3. Then there is the day and night distinction conflict depending on which side of the hemisphere you are in.

Therefore, the sutras simply state “at one time”, signifying that they were spoken at the time that was ideal to be spoken so that the teaching and faculty would be in accord 機教相印. In other words, the critical point is to transmit the teachings that were most useful to the listeners then and still are now.

There are two more aspects:

1. Time is fleeting: as soon as we speak of the present, it is already gone by. Time is really relative because the five skandhas are continually produced and extinguished in each ksana: there is no need to be overly attached to the exact time.
2. Time is only a function of consciousness. We are programmed to discern the three periods of time without realizing that these three periods only reflect the changes of our mind in response to the conditions. The Buddha is different: he is primarily concerned

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with dispensing the teaching when the conditions ripen.

### **Fourth Realization**

The fourth realization is the host, the **Buddha**, referring to Shakyamuni Buddha, the teaching host of our Saha world.

Buddha is Sanskrit for the Enlightened Being:

1. He enlightened himself, as compared to ordinary people who are not enlightened. This refers to the level of wisdom of the Two Vehicles.
2. He can enlighten others, referring to the wisdom of the Bodhisattvas who are skilled in helping others.
3. He perfected the enlightenment of the self and others. When the prior two skills are perfected, you have reached the perfection of enlightenment: there is nothing else to be learned. You are completely free of afflictions and of birth and death.

*Question:* Which of the three bodies does “host” refer to?

*Answer:* It depends on the listeners. Bodhisattvas see the Reward Body Buddha whereas lower level listeners see the Transformation Body Shakyamuni Buddha. Regardless, they all listen with great delight.

### **Fifth Realization**



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The fifth realization is place. The sutra was spoken at **Shravasti, in the Jeta Grove in the Garden of the Benefactor of Orphans and the Solitary.**

Shravasti, 舍衛國 translates into Abundance Virtue 豐德:

- Abundance 豐:
  - of gems 財寶 and
  - of the five objects of desire 五欲.
- Virtue 德. The inhabitants have the virtues of:
  - great learning 多聞 and
  - liberation 解脫: They are unfettered, and are only slightly attached.

It is the capital city of the country of King Prasenajit 波斯匿王, located in Central India.

The Jeta Grove in the Garden of the Benefactor of Orphans and the Solitary 祇樹給孤獨園 was an offering from Sudatta (蘇達多 Sanskrit for “joyous giving” 樂施), who was also known as the Benefactor of the Orphans and Solitary. He was a very rich elder, who did not know about the Buddhadharma. He was a great official in King Prasenajit’s court. While arranging for his son’s wedding, he visited his friend, Elder Shan Tán Nà 珊檀那. The Buddha was in Gṛdhra-kūṭa 靈鷲山 in Magadha 摩竭陀 and had not come to Shravasti yet.

When his friend rose at night to decorate his house to receive

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the Buddha, Sudatta inquired. Upon hearing of the Buddha, Sudatta's hair stood on end and his mind was greatly delighted. He wanted to meet with the Buddha and could not return to sleep.

Although at least fifty li 里 away, the Buddha used his spiritual powers to shine light on Sudatta. The elder followed the light and saw the Buddha from afar. It was like an orphan seeing his father for the first time. The elder was ecstatic and followed the light to have an audience with the Buddha. The gods then manifested and taught him how to bow to the Buddha. The elder followed suit. The Golden Immortal spoke Dharma for the elder. Sudatta was delighted and wanted to make an offering of a place to house the Buddha and his disciples. The Buddha accepted.

The elder immediately went back and started looking for a place. Only Prince Jeta's garden was suitable enough. Jeta is Sanskrit for "Victorious Army 戰勝"; Prince Jeta was the son of King Prasenajit, and was born when the King was victorious in the war against a neighboring country: The garden was about ten lis wide. The Prince did not want to sell and named an absurdly high price: he demanded that the ground of the garden be covered with gold. Sudatta agreed. He came back with carts full of gold to pave the ground. The prince still refused to sell saying that he had only been joking. Sudatta replied that as a future ruler, he had to keep his word. The Prince could not back out and therefore he consented to sell the land and also gave the trees which were not covered by gold.

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The Buddha arrived and told Ananda of the story and named it ‘Jeta Grove in the Garden of the Benefactor of Orphans and the Solitary’ to acknowledge the combined offering from the crown prince and generous elder.

In China, when King Wen 文王 established the nation, he assisted four kinds of poor people: widows, widowers, orphans, and childless or solitary people, setting precedents of charity work for noblemen and elders.

### ***Sixth Realization***

Finally, the sixth realization is the **Audience**:

- The sutra states that the assembly consists of only five groups. The first three follow immediately, and are: sanghans (inner dharma protectors), Bodhisattvas (inner dharma protectors) and gods (outer dharma protectors).
- Two more groups will be listed later: humans and non-humans.
- Only those with superior roots can believe and uphold the Pure Land Dharma Door.
- This is the same Dharma Assembly as that of the Vajra Sutra.

*Question:* The other sutras have the multitudes of living beings and eightfold division as audience, but this sutra only lists five types of listeners. Why is that?

*Answer:* This sutra urges us to rely on the Pure Land Dharma

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Door. The Pure Lands represent a superior environment and place to reside. Only those with superior virtue and worthiness can believe and accept this teaching. That is why only five classes of listeners are listed.

Let's take a closer look at the audience.

**Together with a gathering of Great Bhikshus.** These are not ordinary monks. There are **twelve hundred fifty in all, all Great Arhats well-known to the assembly**, these are all well known disciples with great virtues (i.e. they are not “small” Arhats) who constantly follow the Buddha.

The sangha 僧伽, consisting of sanghans:

- Is one of the first democratic religious bodies.
- Is a Sanskrit word that stands for “Harmonious Assembly” 和合眾: its members live harmoniously together like water and milk, pot and lid.
- Consists of four or more members, conducting business through the Karmavacanā Dharma 同一羯磨. Karmavacanā is a set of protocols that the assembled sanghans of the monastery utilize in order to carry out the common will of the residents.
- Is harmonious in phenomenon and noumenon.
  - Noumenon harmony 同證無為解脫道: Together the sanghans certify to the unconditioned Way of liberation.
  - Phenomenon harmonies have six types:
    1. In body 身和同住: Sanghans dwell together.

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2. In mouth 口和無諍: They refrain from arguing and fighting.
3. In mind 意和同悅: They enjoy cultivating together.
4. In views 見和同解: They have the same views. In particular, they deeply believe in cause and effect.
5. In Precepts 戒和同脩: They all must observe precepts.
6. In Benefits 利和同均: They equally share the offerings from the faithful.

In addition, there are five kinds of sangha:

1. Shameless sangha 無慚愧僧: They break precepts.
2. Mute sheep sangha 啞羊僧: They are dull rooted, lack wisdom, do not understand the three stores, do not conduct karmavacanā, do not speak Dharma etc.
3. Clique sangha 朋黨僧: They like to frequent the rich and powerful. They conduct their affairs separately from the main body.
4. Worldly ordinary sangha 世俗僧: They dimly live like worldly people.
5. Sagely principles sangha 聖義僧: They certify to the fruition and speak Dharma.

The assembly here refers to the fifth kind.

**Bhikshu** is a Sanskrit term that was not translated because it carries multiple meanings:

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1. Mendicant 乞士: Externally they beg for food to nourish the flesh body; internally they beg for the Dharma to sustain the Wisdom Life.
2. Destroy Evil 破惡: They cultivate the transcendental Pure Dharma and destroy the affliction evils.
3. Frighten Mara 怖魔: At full ordination time, the heavenly demons are terrified when they realize that the Buddha's retinues are growing.

Why do left-home people beg for food? Because the Buddha decreed that:

- They will not cook for themselves and should go on alms rounds. This tends to reduce attachment to flavors.
- They single-mindedly cultivate the way to eliminate afflictions. Time that is spared away from the kitchen is to be used for cultivation.
- They will not engage in business, in planting, in holding a job, or in developing professional skills. They therefore do not compete for worldly gains.
- They will not perform the same work as ordinary folks: to do so would be breaking precepts. Their life style is to withdraw from the world, and not to engage in worldly activities.

Upon ascending to the bhikshu precepts platform, during the precept transmission Karmavacanā, they are asked: “Are you a hero 汝是丈夫否?” They reply in the affirmative. Why? The Buddha is the ultimate hero, as is indicated in one of his ten titles Great Hero 大丈夫. The bhikshus are not yet

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realized heroes. Heroes do what is difficult to do. They endure what cannot be endured. They endure the ten kinds of patience, being patient with:

1. The wind: They used to live out in the open and must endure the wind.
2. The rain: They usually dwell under trees for no more than two nights. Some trees are poor shelters for the rain.
3. Hunger: Since they must beg for their food, sometimes they must go hungry if none is offered.
4. Thirst: They may run out of water at times.
5. The cold: In the old days, they only had three sashes to cover their bodies against the cold.
6. The heat: Being quite frugal, they cannot afford modern amenities like air conditioners or heaters.
7. The evil words: When one practices the way of virtue, one is often subject to slander, cursing etc.
8. Poisonous bugs: Especially when residing in the forests.
9. Eating one meal a day: The Buddha decreed that sanghans should take one meal a day before noon.
10. Holding precepts: Left-home people's daily lives are filled with opportunities to violate precepts that they must learn to resist.

Clearly, leaving the home-life is most challenging and requires great personal sacrifice.

Wealth and honor are obstructing-the-Way causes and conditions. People who are wealthy or have social status tend to be egotistical. They lack patience and therefore have a hard time cultivating the Way. Shakyamuni Buddha had the great hero's resolve: he renounced the Wheel Turning Sagely

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King position and left the home-life. The bhikshunis have the same spirit: they are the heroes amongst women. The bhikshus aspire to transcend the Triple Realm of the Desire, Form and Formless Realms, end birth and death, and bring forth the Bodhi resolve. That is the spirit of the great heroes; that is what frightens the demons. Family can obstruct leaving home because they fail to understand the great virtues of leaving the home-life and the benefits that are brought to them individually and to the community and country at large. For example, the areas where Buddhist sages reside are generally free of natural disasters. The Buddhist sages, however, are the last to proclaim so. Do not be fooled by those charlatans who are greedy for your money and adoration!

There are five ways in which the Assembly is **Great**:

1. In Number 數大: There are **1,250** bhikshus **in all**.
2. In Separation 離大: They sever the great obstructions.
3. In Position 位大: The gods, kings and great men respect and admire them.
4. In Name 名大: They are known far and wide.
5. In Recognition 識大: They are better known than the externalists; they possess superior Dharma and lofty virtue 法高德重.

The great bhikshus:

1. Follow Buddha: To learn from him.
2. Turn the Dharma Wheel, which has the following connotations:



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1. Crushing living beings' coarse and fine delusions.
2. Transporting living beings from the ordinary position to sagehood.
3. Have helped numberless gods and humans.
4. They are **well-known** to the great assembly because of their:
  1. Reputation 名.
  2. Wisdom 知: They have a deep understanding of the principles.
5. Along with Bodhisattvas, they influence the assembly 影響眾 acting as role models or opinion leaders.
6. They are also called great bhikshus because they are really Bodhisattvas who manifest as Hinayana bhikshus to help the Buddha turn the Dharma Wheel.

**Arhat** means:

1. Worthy of Offerings 應供: Having established their pure conduct, they act as the field of blessings for the world; they are worthy of offerings from humans and gods. This is the fruition of the beggar cause on the bhikshu causal ground.
2. Killer of Thieves 殺賊: The Four Dwellings have been emptied; they have severed the view and thought delusions and slaughtered all the affliction thieves. This is the fruition of destroying the evil cause on the bhikshu causal ground.
3. Non-birth 無生: They have already accomplished what should be accomplished having ended birth and

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death; they no longer have to undergo reincarnation and have transcended the Triple Realm. This is the fruition of frightening the demons cause on the bhikshu causal ground.

Arhats are listed first because:

1. They embody a world transcending appearance.
2. They are grateful for the Buddha's teaching and constantly follow him everywhere.
3. The Buddhadharma relies primarily on the sangha for transmission. Therefore, they should be the first source of authority.

They are not fixed-nature Arhats 定性 who accomplished their Dharma but do not wish make further progress toward Buddhahood. Rather they are Great Arhats who have the “Turn Around Mind 回心, turning their mind from Small Vehicle Dharma to the Big Vehicle Dharma 乃回小向大.” These Arhats resolve for Bodhi and cultivate the Great Vehicle Dharmas.

The Buddha Ground Shastra 佛地論 states that:

- In the Defiled Lands, the Sound Hearers are the Actual while the Bodhisattvas are the Provisional.
- In the Reward Land, the Bodhisattvas are the Actual while the Sound Hearers are the Provisional.
- In our defiled Saha land, the Bodhisattvas are expedients.

The same shastra also gives four reasons why the Arhats are

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listed first:

1. Appearance-wise, they look very similar to the Buddha.
2. They stay closer to the Buddha.
3. They are stricter in precepts, exhibiting their superior virtues.
4. The Buddha wishes for the Bodhisattvas to abandon all traces of arrogance towards the Two Vehicles.

**Twelve hundred fifty in all** can be accounted for as follows:

- Ajnatakaundinya 陳如 and the other four former personal attendants of the Buddha, who became his first five left-home disciples.
- Uruvila Kashyapa, the oldest brother 優樓頻螺迦葉: he brought in 500 disciples.
- The two younger Kashyapa brothers 伽耶迦葉, 於希連河度那提迦葉二人, who combined to bring in 500 disciples.
- Shariputra and Mahamaudgalyayana: together they brought in 200 disciples.
- Yasa 耶舍長者子: an elder's son who brought 50 of his retainues.
- In all, there are 1,255 but it is rounded to 1,250.

*Question:* The Buddha crossed over limitless living beings. Why only mention these 1,250?

*Answer:* These are the Buddha's very first disciples. They were his constant followers until he entered Nirvana.

## Explained by Master YongHua

The Kasyapa brothers cultivated together since the time of Kasyapa Buddha 迦葉佛. They were fire worshipping Brahmins.

The Buddha used his Wonderful Observing Wisdom 妙觀察智 to select people of influence to teach.

Five hundred were with Uruvila (meaning papaya grove 木瓜林) Kasyapa. Maybe he cultivated in a papaya grove; some say he had a lump on his chest that resembled a papaya; or maybe he loved to eat papayas when he cultivated. Papayas are good for curing lung illnesses. Uruvila was 120 years old. Then the king bowed to him as master and gave him the title “Great Immortal 大仙.”

Uruvila had two brothers: Gaya, meaning city 城 or elephant head mountain 象頭山 and Nadi, meaning river 河. Each had 250 disciples.

The Buddha approached Uruvila and asked to stay overnight. The elder brother got suspicious because he could not size up the Buddha with his spiritual penetrations. Uruvila put the Buddha up in a cave where his protector, a fire breathing dragon, lived. In the middle of the night, the dragon tried to scorch the Buddha. But it could not because the Buddha had entered the fire-light samadhi. The dragon then spat poisonous gas, but the Buddha entered the Kindness Mind Samadhi and did not get hurt. Seeing that his protector was

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subdued, the elder Kasyapa then watched the Buddha exhibit his spiritual powers up to sixteen times before he struck up a thought. The Buddha immediately said that he should not have the arrogant thought that he is an Arhat, because that would be to commit the great lie and he would go to the great hells. The big brother believed and took refuge. He also told his 500 disciples to take refuge. They all threw their instruments for offering fire into the river. Soon after leaving home, they attained the sagely fruition.

Just like their older brother, the two younger ones were also fire worshippers. The second brother was cultivating by the river and suddenly saw a lot of fire worshipping instruments float by. Worried that one of his two older brothers met with harm and went to investigate. Eventually, both of the two younger brothers and their disciples followed suit and also took refuge. They all certified to Arhatship.

**Elders Shariputra, Mahamaudgalyayana, Mahakasyapa, Mahakatyayana, Mahakausthila, Revata, Suddhipanthaka, Nanda, Ananda, Rahula, Gavampati, Pindola-Bharadvaja, Kalodayin, Mahakaphina, Vakkula, Aniruddha, and others such as these, all Great Disciples**

### **Elders:**

**Elders** is a term used show respect for another's position in Dharma-age and virtue. There are three kinds of elders:

1. In age: having reached advanced years.
2. In Dharma nature: understanding the Buddhadharma, regardless of age, qualifies one as an elder in terms of intelligence and wisdom.

## Explained by Master YongHua

3. In blessings and virtues: one to whom people like to make offerings.

All the Arhats listed are elders.

What follows are sixteen great disciples grouped into eight pairs of sages 八對, according to the following categories:

1. Inner wisdom/outer penetrations 內智外通對.
2. Ascetic practice/eloquence 苦行辨才對.
3. Awaken emptiness/Know mirage 悟空知幻對.
4. Renounce stupidity/Humble origin 捨愚謙本對.
5. Erudition/Secret practice 多聞密行對.
6. Flowing stream/Worthy of offerings 流泉應供對.
7. Transform greed/Eliminate arrogance 化貪除慢對.
8. Give medicine/Offer food to the Sangha 施藥筵僧對.

## Shariputra

This venerable Elder is named after his mother. Shari 舍利 is his mother's name, and putra 弗 means son 子. Shariputra can be translated as:

1. "Body son": His mother's body was extremely beautiful. Her demeanor was upright and proper.
2. "Egret son": His mother's eyes were as beautiful as the egret's.
3. "Jewel son": Her eyes shone like jewels and she bore a

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son with beautiful eyes.

Shariputra's father was from the Great Brahmin class, was erudite, and had deep, profound study. He used to indiscriminately study all of the sutras.

His wife dreamt of a man in golden armor, holding a Vajra pestle with which he crushed the mountains to smithereens, leaving only one standing. That auspicious omen indicated that she would give birth to a boy possessing great wisdom, unbeatable in debate, and who could prevail over the other doctrines.

When she got pregnant, her wisdom increased many-fold, and she could hold her own in debates against lofty virtuous cultivators.

While in her womb, Shariputra helped his mother win debates, especially with her brother who used to consistently beat her. The uncle knew that it was due to the child in her womb. The uncle then traveled far and wide and studied for sixteen years. He took no time to bathe or to cut his nails and hence was known as "the Long-Nailed Brahmin." He then returned to find out that his nephew had left-home under the Buddha. Thereupon, he sought out the Buddha and demanded his nephew back. The Buddha replied that he would return Shariputra if the uncle could present a true principle.

"I take non-accepting as my doctrine 我以不受一切法為宗," said the uncle.

## Explained by Master YongHua

“Really? Do you accept your view of non-accepting 汝見受否?” said the Buddha without any hesitation.

The uncle was at a loss. Either way he could not win. To refute it would be to admit that he had no doctrine. To accept it would contradict the doctrine of non-accepting itself.

Before the debate, the uncle insisted that if he won, he could take Shariputra back with him. If he lost, he would offer his head to the Buddha. Realizing that he had lost, the uncle took to his legs and ran away. But he changed his mind and felt ashamed of his cowardice. Thereupon, he went back and asked the Buddha for a knife so that he could cut his head as agreed upon. The Buddha convinced him that it was not smart and talked him into leaving the home-life instead. The uncle did.

Ven. Shariputra was a Dharma nature elder. At the age of eight, he studied and mastered all the Buddhadharmas in seven days and defeated all other Indian philosophers in debates. He was well known in all directions, had lofty aspirations, and was honest in nature. His heart was kind and compassionate. He would soon undo all attachments and unfold his wisdom. He falls under the inner wisdom category 內智, of the first pair.

Shariputra is foremost in wisdom, and is second to none in spiritual penetrations as well. Even Mahamaudgalyayana could not use his spiritual penetrations to move a corner of



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Shariputra's sash while he was in samadhi.

Why was he foremost in wisdom? Because on the causal ground, he met a Good Knowing Adviser who taught him the Prajna Dharma Door of reciting the Great Compassion Mantra, Shurangama Mantra, the Ten Small Mantras and The Heart Sutra. Reciting these every day will make your wisdom unfold.

Shariputra actually already attained Buddhahood and is called Golden Dragon Buddha.

*Question:* There are many Great Arhats also with great wisdom and penetrations, why list Shariputra first amongst them?

*Answer:* Only Shariputra could beat all the Sound Hearers in debate. He had superior and incomparable wisdom. He was Mount Gr̥dhrakūṭa's Dharma requester, and the leader of Vaisali's 毘耶離城 Sound Hearers. If he is listed as the first, how is that unreasonable?

## Mahamaudgalyayana

Maha has three meanings:

1. Great: He is respected by many kings and officials.
2. Many: He has many blessings, virtues, retinues, etc.
3. Victorious: He can defeat and subdue the demons and externalists.

Maudgalyayana means “descendant of a family of bean

## Explained by Master YongHua

gatherers 采菽氏”—referring to his mother’s side. It also means “turnip root 萊菔” because his ancestors ate turnips when they cultivated the Way. Many of them left the home-life. Maudgalyayana was also called “Kolita 拘律陀” after the tree where his parents prayed to the tree spirit for a son.

Maudgalyayana was a close friend of Shariputra. They both were disenchanted with the worldly dusts but had nowhere to turn. They both studied under an externalist teacher but told each other that it was not ultimate. They therefore searched everywhere for a better Dharma.

Shariputra ran into the Buddha’s disciple Asvajit 馬勝, and was greatly impressed by the venerable’s awesome comportment, bliss, and refined appearance. He asked the sramana, “Who is your teacher? What does he teach?”

Asvajit answered, “My teacher is the Buddha,” and then spoke the following verse:

*All dharmas arise from conditions* 諸法從緣生、  
*They also perish from conditions* 諸法從緣滅、  
*My teacher Shakyamuni the Buddha* 我佛釋迦師、  
*Often says so* 常作如是說。”

Upon hearing it, Shariputra certified to First Stage Arhatship. He went back and told his friend Mahamaudgalyayana who also certified to First Stage Arhatship as well.

They both led all their 200 disciples to take refuge with the

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Buddha. The Buddha said, “Welcome bhikshus 善來苾  
丘.” On hearing this, they obtained the full precept  
substance. They gradually cultivated and certified to Fourth  
Stage Arhatship.

Maudgalyayana was foremost in spiritual penetrations. He  
was exceptionally filial to his parents and rescued countless  
living beings who were suffering in the netherworlds. He is  
classified under the outer penetration category 外通 of the  
first pair.

There are six kinds of spiritual penetrations:

1. As-You-Wish Spiritual Penetration 如意通: This is  
also called the spiritual foot spiritual penetration 神足  
通 because one can go or fly anywhere without ob-  
structions, and can manifest or transform freely.

According to the Great Shastra, there are three kinds of  
“as you wish” penetration. The first entails the ability  
to go anywhere 能到, which has four possible varia-  
tions: a) the body can fly like a bird 身能飛行, b)  
“moving the distance but staying close” 移遠作近:  
one can travel to other locations while one’s physical  
body stays in the same place, c) disappearing here and  
appearing there 此沒彼出, d) arriving in the span of  
a thought 一念即能至. The second “as you wish”  
penetration involves being able to transform and

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change 轉變. One can change from big to small and vice versa. One can manifest many from one and change from one to many. The final “as you wish” penetration is referred to as The Sagely As You Wish 聖如意. One can observe and see that the six dusts are not worth attaching to, one can see the impure as pure, and one can observe and see lovable and pure things, which are usually adored, as impure. Only the Buddha has this third penetration.

Such spiritual penetrations are the result of cultivating the four bases of spiritual powers which will be described later. They successively manifest with cultivation over time.

2. Heavenly Eye Penetration 天眼通, which is also called the Pure Eye 淨眼, allows one to see far and close in the Desire and Form Realms. One can use this spiritual eye to see all the things in the six paths, both in this land and below.

The Heavenly Eye comes in two types. The first is obtained by humans through cultivation such as by those with samadhi (the four dhyanas and samadhis). The other kind is obtained through retribution by birth to the heavens.

The Heavenly Eye can give rise to the birth and death wisdom 死生智, enabling one to know how sentient beings die from one realm and are reborn into another.

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3. Heavenly Ear Penetration 天耳通: One can hear sounds in the Desire and Form Realms. One can hear sounds in this land, below and above, whether from humans or non-humans, close or far, etc...

As in the case of the Heavenly Eye, this penetration also comes in two types: either that obtained through cultivation or through retribution.

4. Others' Thoughts Penetration 他心通: One can read other people's thoughts.
5. Knowledge of Past Lives Penetration 宿命通: One can know of one's past lives: which world, name, lifespan, living conditions (suffering or blissful), etc. one has had. One can know the birth and deaths of the five skandhas with outflow in the Desire and Form Realms. One cannot know of the Formless Realm incarnations. One may be able to remember existences back to past great kalpas.

Arhats and Pratyekabuddhas can remember back to 80,000 great kalpas ago.

6. Ending of Afflictions Penetration 漏盡通: With this penetration, all outflows have ended and one no longer undergoes birth and death. The prior five penetrations can be cultivated or obtained by retribution. This one, however, must be obtained through cultivation, and only sages can attain it.

## Explained by Master YongHua

Here again there are two types. One belongs to the Buddhas who have ended all outflow habit energies. The other belongs to the Bodhisattvas who have not yet ended all outflow habit energies.

After obtaining these spiritual penetrations, Maudgalyayana saw his mother in the hells, suffering of thirst and hunger. He flew over and brought food for her. She greedily took the bowl of food he gave her with one hand while covering it with the other. As soon as she put the food to her mouth, her karmic obstructions turned it into flaming coals that burned her lips. Mahamuagalyayana was greatly distressed and asked the Buddha for help. He was told to use the Ullambana 盂蘭盆 “releasing those who are hanging upside-down” Dharma. On the fifteenth day of the seventh lunar month, the Buddha’s delight day and the monks’ pravaraṇa 自恣, Maudgalyayana did as the Buddha instructed and offered all varieties of food and drinks to the sangha of the ten directions. Using their combined power, his mother could then be released from her suffering. Because Maudgalyayana did as ordered, his mother was consequently reborn to the heavens thanks to this Ullambana Dharma.

## Mahakashyapa

“Maha” distinguishes him from the other Kashyapas.

Kashyapa means “great turtle clan 大龜氏” because his ancestors saw the pattern on the back of a giant turtle and

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used it to cultivate the Way. It also means “light drinking clan 飲光氏” because his body shone with a light that seems to drink up or eclipse all other lights.

His body shined because seven Buddhas ago, in the time of Buddha Vipasyin 毗婆尸佛, there was a poor woman who decided to repair a ruined temple. The temple had no roof and thus all the images were left exposed to the elements. One of the Buddha images even had a gap in its face. She went everywhere asking for help. After collecting enough money, she commissioned a goldsmith to re-gild the images. The goldsmith fell in love with the woman, offered his labor for free and they got married. For 91 kalpas, they were husband and wife and their bodies shone with purple and golden light.

Mahakashyapa constantly enjoyed blessings for 91 kalpas, and his wife often born amongst the god and human realms. Eventually he was born into the Brahma Heaven. At that time in Magadha 摩竭陀國 there was a Brahmin who was very rich from having cultivated blessings in prior lives. He was smart, very wise, and had mega blessings (his store house was full of silver, gold, and the seven gems; it had cattle, sheep, fields, houses, servants, chariots and carts). He was even richer than the king. The king had 1,000 gold plows. He was afraid of being accused of being as rich as the king, fearing that he might be punished by the king, so he purposely only kept 999 gold plows. He also had 1,000 gold blankets; the worst one was worth 100,000 grams of gold. He had 60 chuan 圀 of gold nuts, each 圀 having a size of 340 hu 斛 (a

## Explained by Master YongHua

measurement unit used in ancient China; 24 liters = 1 hu ).

Although fabulously rich, the Brahmin had no son. There was a tree spirit living by the side of his house. He and his wife prayed to the spirit for a son. After several years, they still obtained no response. He said angrily, “After another seven days of sincere offerings, if there still is no response, I will burn up this tree.” The tree spirit got worried and scared, and reported this to the Four Heavenly Kings.

The Four Heavenly Kings reported it to Shakra, who investigated and saw that no one in Jambudvipa was blessed enough to be his son. Shakra then reported to Lord Brahma who saw that Kashyapa was dying, and therefore advised him to be reborn as the rich Bramin's son. This explains Mahakashyapa’s personal name, which is “pippala 必鉢羅” because his parents prayed to the spirit of the pippala tree to grant them a son.

So a son was born into the Brahmin family. A physiognomist was consulted and predicted that he would leave the home-life. The parents were not pleased with the prediction. They came up with a multitude of ways to dissuade him and rid his mind of such thoughts. They decided to marry him off since the opposite sex was what keeps us in the world. At the age of fifteen, the parents announced that they were seeking a wife for him. Kashyapa refused, declared he wished to lead a life of purity (probably from his Brahma Heavens habit energy). His parents would not give their consent. Kashyapa then came up with a ruse: he would only marry a girl whose body had a purple golden light.



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Undaunted, his parents contacted all their Brahmin connections to find such a girl. The Brahmins built an upright adorned gold statue and traveled the land proclaiming that the girls who saw and bowed to the gold statue spirit would marry a good husband. There was a lady whose body shone with golden color. She was upright and proper without compare. She heard the news and came over to bow to the golden statue. The Brahmin approved her at first sight and married her to his son.

After getting married, Mahakashyapa and his new wife agreed that there would be no hanky panky between them. Both agreed to live in separate rooms. Their parents discovered the pact and destroyed one room forcing them to share the same room. Then they made a new agreement: one would sleep while other cultivated. Once, while the wife was sleeping, she stretched her arm outside from the bed and a poisonous snake entered the room, wishing to strike her arm. Kashyapa caught sight of the snake. He immediately covered his arm with some cloth, gently lifted her arm and placed it back on bed.

His wife suddenly awoke and scolded him for his impure behavior. “Why did you touch my arm?” she asked. Kashyapa explained to her that a poisonous snake had threatened to bite her. She said, “If bitten, half of my body would be withering. But if touched by my husband, I’d fall into the three evil destinies.” Husband and wife washed and bathed thoroughly. Deeply abhorring the world, they both came to their parents’ room and begged for permission to leave the home-life. The parents could not dissuade them and

## Explained by Master YongHua

finally agreed.

Both became left-home people. They sought out the Buddha who accepted them as disciples. They both cultivated vigorously and gradually obtained the fruition. The Venerable's mind was firm and flawless like jade. His body and face were of a golden color. Most other cultivators could not compare with their practice. His practice of lessening desires and knowing contentment was unparalleled.

Even today, Ven. Mahakashyapa has yet not entered Stillness. Rather, he entered samadhi at Chicken Foot mountain 現在雞足山 in Yunnan. He will present Shakyamuni's sash to Maitreya at the Dragon Flower Assembly. Then his work in the Saha world will be complete. His wife became "Purple and Golden Light" Bhikshuni.

Mahakashyapa was the very First Patriarch of the Orthodox Buddhadharma lineage. When Shakyamuni Buddha spoke Dharma at Vulture Peak, the Great Brahma Heaven King presented him with a golden lotus and offered his body as a Dharma seat. The Buddha held the flower in front of an assembly of hundreds of thousands of gods and men. Only Mahakashyapa broke into a smile. The Buddha said, "I have the Proper Dharma-Eye Treasury 我有正法眼藏, the Wonderful Nirvana Mind 涅槃妙心, the Real Mark which is unmarked 實相無相, the subtle and wonderful Dharma Door 微妙法門. I now bestow this Dharma Door to Mahakashyapa in a mind-to-mind transmission 咐囑摩訶

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迦葉。”

Mahakashyapa left the home-life under Shakyamuni at the age of 160. He was foremost in ascetic practices 頭陀 as well as in age.

Ascetic practice 苦行 means “making an effort 抖擻, striking up one’s spirits with courage and vigor 打起精神” to sweep away defilements and afflictions. The cultivation of these ascetic practices is a sign that the Buddhadharma is being maintained. For as long as they are practiced, the Dharma will remain in the world. If they are not practiced, the Buddhadharma will disappear.

The Twelve Ascetic Practices 頭陀行 are:

1. Wearing rag robes 著弊納. In the old times, monks had to collect discarded rags from garbage bins, wash them thoroughly and then sew them together to make sashes. The sashes are symbols of not being attached to nice clothes. The advantages are to decrease greed so that one’s heart is calm and at peace, and others are not envious.
2. Having only three robes to wear 但三衣, along with one bowl and a sitting cloth. The three robes are the great robe, the sanghati, which consists of 25 strips of cloth divided into 108 patches, worn when lecturing on the sutras or visiting the king. The second is the outer robe, the uttarasanga, made of seven strips, worn when bowing repentance or worshipping the Buddha. The third is the in-

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ner robe, the antarvasaka, which is worn at all times, to work, travel or entertain guests. One learns to be content with few possessions.

3. Always begging for food 常行乞食. One does not cook for oneself.
4. Begging in succession 次第乞食, sequentially going to seven houses without any discrimination. If no food is offered at those seven houses, they simply go hungry for the day. Mahakashyapa used to specialize in begging from poor people while Subhuti specialized in begging from rich people. The Buddha chastised them and told his left-home disciples not to discriminate among donors.
5. Eating one meal at noon 受一食法, which reduces the time required for eating and creates more time for cultivation.
6. Reducing the measure of what you eat 節量食—i.e. eating a little less.
7. Not drinking juice after noon 中後不得飲漿, to avoid giving rise to pleasure and attachment, distracting one from single-minded focus on practicing the good dharmas.
8. Dwelling in an aranya 在阿蘭若處. Aranya means “still and quiet place.” One is left alone and there are no distracting noises.
9. Dwelling at the foot of a tree 樹下止. Left-home people used to live in the open. They would stop under trees to rest and stay the night. They would then move on after two nights in order to prevent creating conditions.

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10. Dwelling under the open sky 露地住. This sharpens and toughens the mind, facilitating one's ability to enter the emptiness samadhi.
11. Dwelling in a graveyard 塚間住. This is a very effective cure for laziness because being surrounded by ghosts and spirits will put us on our toes.
12. Ribs not touching the mat 但坐不臥. One does not lie down, making one less prone to getting afflicted.

Mahakashyapa cultivated all of the above twelve practices. Even when he was over two hundred years old and the Buddha told him to take it easy, he simply smiled and kept it up.

Much of the information about the Buddha's disciples comes from Great Master Xuan Hua's explanation of the Amitabha Sutra.

## Mahakatyayana

### 摩訶迦旃延

The Great Hair Cutting Scissors 大翦剃 were male descendants of the Brahmin class. In the ancient times, these immortals ('immortal' means having a very long life, but not living forever) cultivated in secluded mountains. They grew old and their hair and beards became long, which they did not cut because the Brahmins forbade cutting hair. One Brahmin had two sons. The two brothers came to visit their father and the younger son offered trim all the immortals' hair. They all agreed and later accomplished the (immortal) Way.

## Explained by Master YongHua

Subsequently this class was named ‘Hair Cutting Scissors’. This group was composed of the ancestors of this immortal.

Katyayana means fan cord 扇繩. Katyayana’s mother loved him dearly. Soon after birth, his father died and his mother wanted to re-marry but this child was like a tie that prevented her from doing so.

In the past, Katyayana used the Five Precepts to sweep the causal ground. He therefore obtained the result of being upright and proper without compare. He traveled extensively to transform and guide beings. He once met with a King who was very impressed with his upright and proper demeanor. When the king asked the World Honored One about Katyayana’s upright appearance, the Buddha replied that, since the King already used the Five precepts to eliminate defilements, he too would obtain a similar upright and proper comportment. The King was greatly pleased and brought forth the Bodhi mind.

This Venerable Sage’s debating words rushed out like heavy waves. His facial features were flawless like crystal. He could use the wisdom torch to destroy the long night’s darkness and could rapidly break or destroy his opponent’s case with sharp words. He defeated the doctrines of the six famous contemporary teachers’ and their cohorts.

Katyayana means “literary elegance 文飾”—his eloquence was unparalleled, and he was foremost in debate 論義. The Agama sutras told how he debated with a Brahmin externalist

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who did not believe in the heavens or hells, but believed only in nihilism. This externalist's premise was that if people went to hells or heavens after death, they would have come back to tell their family and friends. Mahakatyayana explained that those who went to the heavens would never bother coming back because that would be like going back to an outhouse. As for the hell dwellers, they could not come back because they were in a prison and could no longer come and go as they pleased. The externalist was speechless and conceded.

There are four kinds of unobstructed eloquence:

1. Unobstructed eloquence in Dharma: To be able to explain the Dharma without obstruction.
2. Unobstructed eloquence in meaning: To be able to explain the Dharma's limitless meanings.
3. Unobstructed eloquence in phrasing: One's rhetoric is effective.
4. Eloquence of unobstructed delight in speech: To take delight in explaining the Dharma by enrapturing one's listeners.

'Katyayana' also means "good shoulder 好肩" because his shoulders were beautiful. In addition, it means "victorious thinker 思勝", again because of his unobstructed eloquence.

Of the eight pairs of virtues/distinctive competences according to which the Great Arhats are listed, Katyayana manifests eloquence.

## Mahakausthila

## 摩訶拘絺羅

He was Shariputra's maternal uncle. His name means "big knees 大膝" because having big knees ran in their family. His nickname was long-nailed Brahmin 長爪梵志. He was well-versed in the Four Vedas 四圍陀典 and was also gifted in debate 辯若傾江. He vastly penetrated externalist skills 博通道術, his speech was as refined as jade, and he extensively collected the teachings 遍攬經書.

Mahakausthila certified to Arhatship through awakening to the principle of Emptiness. He was therefore known as "Awakened to Emptiness" 悟空. Further, Mahakausthila was foremost in replies 答問.

## Revata

### 離婆多

Revata means "constellation 北方星宿", he was given this name after the fourth of the twenty-eight constellations, "the house, the rabbit and the sun 房日兔," because his parents prayed to that constellation in order to have him.

His name also means "false unity 假和合." Revata was spending the night on the road when two ghosts came by dragging a corpse. The big ghost asked Revata whether or



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not they should eat the corpse. Revata remained silent, not daring to say anything. Then the big ghost tore a limb off the corpse, and the small one replaced it with Revata's body part. That was how they finished off the corpse. In the morning Revata ran down the road screaming, "Take a look, do I still have a body?" People thought he was nuts. He finally met two high masters who happened to be Arhats. Recognizing his potential, they gave him instructions, saying, "The body is basically created by a combination of causes and conditions. When the conditions and causes separate, the body is destroyed. There is nothing that is you and nothing that is not you." Hearing this Revata was enlightened. He left the home-life and certified to the fruition. His mind was not scattered and his mouth would not utter a lie. He falls under the pair 'Understanding Illusion' 知幻, and is foremost in being "not upset or confused 無倒亂."

## Suddhipanthaka

### 周利槃陀伽

Suddhipanthaka, whose name means "little roadside" (to continue being born by the road side), had an older brother named Mahapanthaka, which means "big roadside." In India, women customarily return to their parents' home to give birth. For both of her children, their mother was late in returning and ended up giving birth by the roadside.

Unlike his older brother who was extremely intelligent, Mahapanthaka was very stupid. This was his retribution for being stingy with the Dharma when he was a Dharma Master

## Explained by Master YongHua

in a former life.

Their mother was a rich merchant's daughter. She had an illegitimate liaison with a slave. Out of shame and fear, they both eloped under cover of the night. When she was about to give birth, the wife told her new husband that they should return home. Her husband was reluctant and procrastinated. Not being able to wait any longer, she eventually left on her own. But it was too late, she gave birth by the roadside to 'Big Roadside'. Then she was expecting again and left for her parents' home but was late again and gave birth to 'Little Roadside'. So she never had a chance to bring her boys back to visit her family.

The two brothers grew up and asked about their grandparents, uncles, and aunts. One day, they traveled back to visit the grandparents. They checked into a hotel in town and sent word to the family. The grandparents sent money to the parents with the following words, "Live where you want, you should avoid the shame of facing us; your grandchildren are accepted." The parents left without visiting the family and entrusted the two brothers to the grandparents.

Big Roadside often accompanied his grandfather to go listen to the Buddha's discourses. Mahapanthaka asked to leave the home-life. His grandfather gladly approved. He became a novice monk and later was fully ordained. He studied and attained Arhatship.

He asked his grandfather to allow his younger brother to leave the home-life. The grandfather also gladly approved. So Little Roadside became a novice. The Buddha instructed

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500 Arhats to teach him a verse. They took turns, night and day, trying to teach him:

*“Guard your mouth, gather your mind; with your body, don’t offend* 守口攝意身莫犯

*Do not annoy a single living being* 莫惱一切諸有情  
*Stay away from non-beneficial bitter practices* 無益苦行  
當遠離

*Conduct like this can save the world* 如是行者可度。”

However, Suddhipanthaka could not commit it to memory even after 100 days. His brother scolded him and told him that he was useless and should return to lay life. He wanted to hang himself. The Buddha transformed into a tree spirit and explained the Dharma to him. He taught him “掃帚 sweep clean”, that is to sweep away all views, thoughts and afflictions, and that was how Little Roadside became enlightened in three weeks. Afterwards, he obtained limitless unobstructed eloquence.

Suddhipanthaka was foremost in maintaining the principles 義持.

From this story we can learn that, in cultivation, one need not fear that one is not intelligent enough. Instead one should be fearful that one is unwilling to bring forth the mind of cultivation. Stupid people can obtain great wisdom. Reciting “sweep clean” can even result in Arhatship! How much more will be the case with reciting the Buddha’s name!

## Explained by Master YongHua

In a prior life, he also attained great success under the Buddha. The Buddha was born into a wealthy family. He was appointed Treasurer to the King, and he excelled at omens. The Buddha once saw a dead mouse, consulted the stars, and said, “Someone of lowly station can pick up this dead mouse, start a business and keep a wife.” A poor young man, who would later become Suddhipanthaka, overheard and picked up the dead mouse. He sold it to a tavern owner to feed his cat, earning one coin.

The poor man then bought molasses with the coin. He brought a water pitcher and gave a little bit of molasses and water to some flower gatherers. To express their gratitude, they gave him some flowers which he sold in the market. He returned the following day with more molasses and water. He was given flowering plants which he also sold, thus quickly earning several coins.

One day it became very windy and twigs were blown all over the King’s garden. He struck a deal with the royal gardener offering to remove them. He gave molasses to playground children in exchange for their help in picking up the branches. A potter came by, bought the branches for 20 coin pieces and gave him many vessels.

The young man next supplied 500 mowers with free water from the vessels and asked them to return the favor later. He befriended a land and sea trader, who tipped him of a horse trader coming to town with 500 horses to sell. The young man went to the mowers asked each of them to give him a clump of grass and promised not sell their grass until after he

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sold his. The horse trader found no grass and bought grass from him for 1,000 coins.

Then the sea-trader informed him of a new ship filled with merchandise coming to port. He hired an elegant carriage by the hour, went to port in style and bought the ship on credit. 1,000 town merchants then came to port to buy merchandise. They were informed that the young great merchant already owned it. Each town merchant agreed to pay 100 coins for a share of the ship plus 100 coins to buy him out, totaling 200,000 coin pieces.

He later came to see the treasurer with 1,000 coins as a gift. He recounted his story to the treasurer who married off his own daughter to him. The young man eventually succeeded his father-in-law as treasurer.

### Nanda

難陀

The Buddha had three “nanda” disciples: Ananda, Sundarananda and Nanda.

Nanda means “wholesome bliss 善歡喜.” He was a cowherder before he heard the Buddha speak of the eleven matters of tending cows, a teaching in which the Buddha uses cow tending as an analogy for cultivating the Way. Nanda subsequently decided to leave the home-life and soon attained Arhatship.

On one occasion the Buddha instructed Nanda to preach to a

## Explained by Master YongHua

group of 500 bhikshunis. Hearing him speak, they all attained Arhatship. In a former life, Nanda was a king and the 500 bhikshunis were his concubines. The king was a great Dharma protector and built a grand pagoda in honor of the Buddha. The women made daily offerings at the pagoda, vowing that they would obtain liberation in the future with the king.

Nanda was foremost in ceremonies 儀容.

### Sundarananda

孫陀羅難陀

Sundarananada was also known as “Venerable Happy”, and was born on the ninth day of the fourth lunar month.

His body had a golden color, complete with 30 hallmarks. He was also known as foremost in looks.

There was a naked externalist who became tongue-tied when he attempted to debated with Shariputra. The externalist then gave rise to deep faith in the Buddhadharma and wanted to leave the home-life. When he saw Sundarananda’s handsome and adorned appearance, he exclaimed, “The small bhikshu’s wisdom is exceptional and he is also so dignified.” He thus followed suit and left the home-life.

Sundarananda was the Buddha’s little brother. He loved his wife Sundari 孫陀羅 more than anything. The Buddha passed by one day on his alms bowl round. Sundari was having lunch with her husband. As he went to make an

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offering to the Buddha, his wife spat on the ground and told him he had better be back before it dried.

As Sundarananda made a step toward the Buddha to fill his bowl, the Buddha stepped back and low and behold, within a few steps, Sundarananda found himself in the Jeta Grove, five miles from home. The Buddha then told him to leave home. After having his head shaved, he still nurtured plans to run away at the earliest possible opportunity.

One day, he was left alone to watch the door while everyone else went out begging for food. He was supposed to sweep the floor. He swept one end to find the wind blowing it all over the room. He tried closing the window but a gust of wind would open it. This went on for a couple of hours. He gave up because he thought that they would be back any moment.

He took the back road home hoping to avoid running into the Buddha. He hid behind a tree but still could not avoid running into the Buddha and ended up going back with the World Honored One.

One day, the Buddha used his spiritual powers to take Sundarananda to the mountains. There he saw some monkeys and exclaimed, “My wife is prettier.”

Then The Buddha took him to the heavens. He saw a palace with 500 goddesses and servants. He found that it was to be his when he died. When asked by the Buddha, he exclaimed, “Sundari is like a monkey compared to these goddesses.” He came back and cultivated vigorously while waiting to go to

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the heavens.

Later, when he was taken by the Buddha on a tour to the hells, he encountered two ghosts tending to an oil pot. The fire went out and the oil wasn't even simmering.

Sundarananda inquired and the lazy ghosts replied, "There is no rush. This pot is reserved for the Buddha's brother. When his heavenly blessings run out, he'll fall to the hells." Upon hearing this, his hair stood on end. As a result, he stopped cultivating for heavenly blessings and soon attained to Arhatship.

### **Ananda**

Ananda is the Buddha's first cousin. His name means "rejoicing 慶喜", chosen because he was born on the day the Buddha became enlightened, to his father White Rice King. He left-home under the Buddha at the age of twenty. Along with Mahakashyapa, he was the Buddha's attendant. Standing in front was Mahakashyapa. Ananda would stand right behind him.

He asked the Buddha to repeat his previously spoken sermons to him again. And he could remember them all.

Mahakashyapa said that the great ocean Buddhadharma had entered into Ananda's mind.

In a prior life, Ananda was a very rich elder. He offered some drink to a novice monk who was reciting sutras. He then made the vow, "When that novice monk realizes Buddhahood I vow to become his erudite disciple." That shami was a



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former incarnation of Shakyamuni Buddha.

Ananda was foremost in learning and had eight inconceivable states:

1. He never accepted special invitations.
2. He never wore the Buddha's old clothes.
3. He did not look at improper things.
4. He did not give rise to defiled thoughts, even when he saw goddesses, asura women and dragon women.
5. He knew which samadhi the Buddha entered while the other bhikshus did not.
6. He knew the benefits received by the beings who were taught by the Buddha while in samadhi.
7. He understood completely all the Dharma the Buddha spoke.
8. He never had to have a Dharma repeated. He heard it once and would remember it.

In general, sramanas cannot accept special invitations. They must eat with the assembly and cannot eat alone.

### Rahula 羅侯羅

Rahula was the Buddha's son, born from his former wife Yasodhara 耶蘇陀羅. He stayed in her womb for six years.

His name means "obstacle 覆障." In a past life, Rahula plugged up a mouse hole for six days and therefore had to

## Explained by Master YongHua

undergo the retribution of staying in his mother's womb for six years.

Before leaving the royal palace to cultivate, Yasodhara asked the crown prince for a child. The prince pointed his finger at her belly and she was pregnant with Rahula. When Rahula was born six years later, king Suddhodana and the whole family thought that his mother behaved improperly. They did not believe her explanations and dug a hole and decided to throw her and the child into the fire pit. Yasodhara stepped up to the pit holding her child and prayed, "If I am innocent, may this fire pit turn into a lotus pool." She stepped into the pit. It turned into a pool of water with a red lotus that grew out to safely catch both mother and child. That quelled the King's and people's suspicion and stopped their criticism and slander.

Rahula has another name: obstructing sun 執日. In a former life, he was a crown prince, and was one of two brothers. The older was named Sun and the younger Moon. After their father's death, the older brother succeeded to the throne. Later he started abhorring glory and riches. He decided to abdicate the throne to his younger brother. He then left the home-life with the Buddha and purely maintained precepts. He did not commit even the slightest infraction. Later, in the dark of the night, he inadvertently used another's water jug. Thereupon, he immediately hit the bell to convoke the sangha to repent. The sangha felt that his fault was insignificant and did not agree to his repentance. His worries grew deeper. He ended up entering the royal palace to inform King Moon, seeking repentance for that stealing offense. King Moon did

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not wish to go against his beloved brother's wish so he ordered his assistants to confine his brother to a room. His greed was expelled and he was overjoyed. As a result of his preoccupation for his brother's welfare, for six months the King neglected his rule. In this lifetime, Rahula had to incur the evil retribution of being confined inside his mother's womb for six years.

Rahula was foremost in secret practices 密行. He worked very hard. He could enter samadhi anywhere, even while he was inside an outhouse.

In the Dharma Flower Sutra, the Buddha said that when he was crown prince, Rahula was an elder. Now that the World Honored One has attained the Way, that elder became his Dharma prince. Only the Buddha could know the full extent of Rahula's secret practices.

The Buddha has three kinds of disciples:

1. True sons 真子: These are the Bodhisattvas.
2. Initiate sons 內子: These are the Arhats with one-sided emptiness and have not attained yet the principle of the Middle Way.
3. Uninitiate sons 外子: This refers to ordinary people.

## Gavampati 橋梵波提

His name means "cow cud 牛呵."

## Explained by Master YongHua

Far in the past, he made fun of an old bhikshu who could not eat solid food because his teeth were no good, saying, “You eat like a cow.” The old monk happened to be a Pratyekabuddha and instructed him to repent. Though he did repent, he was nonetheless reborn 500 times as a cow. He finally met with Shakyamuni Buddha, learned to cultivate and attained Arhatship. He is foremost in heavenly and human offerings 受天人供.

In the past, Gavampati picked up a stalk of wheat. Many grains fell on the ground. He therefore had to undergo 500 lives as a cow to eat them. Then, although he was in the human realm, he still made cow chewing manifestations, snorting all day like a cow chewing its cud. Fearful that others might slander him, resulting in their falling and undergoing suffering, the Buddha ordered him to go to the Trayastrimsa heaven garden to cultivate Chan.

After the Buddha’s Nirvana, during the compilation of the Dharma Store, someone came to visit Gavampati, who then asked, “Is the World Honored One at peace and blissful?” They informed him that the Buddha already entered Stillness. Gavampati then asked, “How about my teacher?” The reply was, “Shariputra could not stand seeing the World Honored One enter Stillness. He said that the Triple Realm is without shelter and decided to enter Stillness early too.”

Ven. Gavampati heard the words, sighed three times, and transformed water which flowed from his heavenly place to earth. Inside the water stream there was a gatha:

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“*Gavampati head face and body* 橋梵波提頭面禮  
*Within the wonderful assembly was foremost upright and*  
*adorned* 妙眾端嚴第一像

*The elephant king left and the elephant son followed* 象王既  
去象子隨

*As the Great teacher entered Stillness, so I do too* 大師入  
滅我亦滅。”

He then transformed a fire to burn his own body and entered Stillness. That’s how loyal and devoted he was to the Buddha and his teacher.

He is therefore known as flowing stream 流泉.

### **Pindola Bharadvaja** 賓頭盧頗羅墮

His name means “unmoving sharp roots 不動利根.” To this day, he still has not entered Nirvana because he broke the rule.

Arhats are not supposed to display their spiritual powers casually. Once an elder carved a bowl out of sandalwood and put it on top of a pole and proclaimed that whoever could use his spiritual powers to bring it down could have it. Pindola Bharadvaja could not resist and did. At the time, he was in the mountains. He used his Heavenly Eye to look from afar,

## Explained by Master YongHua

rode over lightning fast by spiritual penetration and entered the king's city. He covered up the sun and the sky was totally dark. Within the city everyone was terrified. An expectant mother had a miscarriage.

When this was reported to the Buddha, the Buddha severely chastised him and said, "From now on you may no longer follow me nor enter Stillness. You have to stay for extended lengths of time in the world to allow people to increase their blessings by accepting their offerings." He now dwells in a southern Indian mountain 南天竺摩利支山. He accepts invitations and goes to receive offerings by manifesting his body. He used to request the proper ceremonies and rules. Whenever Jambudvipa people make offerings to the Triple Jewel, he comes and receives them.

Pindola Bharadvaja is thus foremost as a field of blessings 福田.

### **Kalodayin** 迦留陀夷

Kalodayin was of the Brahmin class and was a teacher of the crown prince Siddhartha before Siddhartha left the home-life to cultivate and become the Buddha.

His name means "black light 黑曜." His skin was black but his body glowed and his eyes shone. One night he went begging and a pregnant woman saw him; she thought he was a ghost, was frightened, had a miscarriage and died. As a

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result, a precept was created forbidding sramanas to take walks at night.

Kalodayin served as the Buddha's attendant and as a Dharma protector. He was the foremost teacher 教化 who taught and transformed the greatest number of people, having crossed over countless certified sages.

### Mahakaphina 摩訶劫賓那

Kaphina means “constellation 房宿.” His parents prayed to one of the 28 constellations in order to have him.

He lived in the country of Kosala 憍薩羅國. The World Honored One manifested as an old bhikshu to teach him and cause him to attain the Way. The Buddha held a tin staff while walking and stayed with Kaphina in a thatch hut. When the Buddha recognized that his good roots had matured, the Buddha regained his original form. When Mahakaphina looked at the hallmarks, he immediately brought forth the mind for Bodhi. He listened to the Buddha's subtle words and extinguished his arrogance. That is why he is part of the extinguishing arrogance 除慢 pair.

Kaphina is foremost in knowledge of astrology 解知星宿.

### Vakkula

## 薄拘羅

Vakkula is Sanskrit for “good bearing 善容.”

Vakkula was extremely handsome. After the Nirvana of Buddha Vipasyin 毗婆尸佛, a Pratyekabuddha monk had a severe headache. Although Vakkula was a pauper, he managed to give some fruit to the ailing monk. The bhikshu ate it and his sickness was cured. Due to this offering, for 91 kalpas he received wealth and bliss in the god and human realms.

The Vakkula Sutra says, “I have been studying the Proper Dharma and Vinaya. For 80 years, I never had the slightest illness even for the duration of a finger snap. I never even took any medicine or medicinal fruit 我於此正法律中學道以來，八十年未曾有病乃至彈指頃頭痛者。未曾憶服藥乃至一片訶梨勒（果名）。”

Foremost in age 壽命, Vakkula lived to be 160.

From the minute cause of giving of medicine, he obtained such an absence of disease superior retribution. Therefore he falls under the giving medicine pair 施藥.

Also, in a past life Vakkula was also a monk. He made the vow not look at any woman’s face, not to accept clothes from a woman or receive food from women. His mother missed



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him terribly. She came to the temple for a visit. He was not happy and chased her away. His mother harbored anger and believed that her son committed one of the five rebellious offenses. She made an evil vow, “In the future when I become his mother, I will blame him for numerous faults and often give him punishments.” Now when he was born to her again, he had to undergo the five kinds of non-deaths by infanticide.

However, because Vakkula kept the precept of not killing very purely in the past, not harming any creature, not even grass or trees, he obtained five kinds of death-free retributions:

1. Fire cannot kill him 火燒不死: at birth, instead of crying like other babies, he smiled. Believing that he was a ghost, his mother threw him into the fire. He emerged unscathed.
2. Water cannot boil him to death 湯煮不死: seeing that he was not harmed by fire, she really was convinced that he was a ghost. She therefore put him into a kettle and tried to boil him. But again he emerged unscathed when the kettle lid was lifted.
3. Water cannot drown him 水淹不死: Exasperated, his mother then threw him into the ocean, a big fish swallowed him whole. Therefore he escaped getting drowned.
4. Fish cannot swallow him to death 魚吞不死: A fishermen caught the fish with a net. Therefore he was not killed by being swallowed by a fish.

## Explained by Master YongHua

5. Knives cannot kill him 刀割不死: The fishermen used a knife to cut open the fish. He emerged unscathed from its belly thereby proving that he could not be harmed by knives.

Vakkula later left the home-life and eventually realized the sagely fruition. He was well known for his practice of lessening desire and knowing contentment. He did not wear heavy clothes, disliked crowds, preferred to be a loner and constantly enjoyed samadhi bliss. Even after his own Nirvana, his stupas preferred quietude. Once King Asoka offered a coin at his stupa. The coin flew up and landed on the King's foot. So even after his Nirvana, he disliked his stupa being disturbed.

### Aniruddha 阿那樓駄

Aniruddha means “not poor 無貧.”

Long ago, during the time of Pusya Buddha 弗沙佛, Aniruddha was a poor farmer who offered his lunch to a Pratyekabuddha. As a result, for 91 kalpas, he was not poor and obtained pleasure as he wished. He therefore falls under the pair: offering food to the sangha 筵僧.

Also, in the past, he was a hunter. He wanted to steal a fine gem. However, with one look at the Buddha's hallmarks, he brought forth the Bodhi mind, abandoned bow and arrows and vowed to no longer harm beings. Due to this goodness

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power, he then could leave the home-life.

Aniruddha would often doze off while the Buddha lectured. One day, the Buddha scolded him, saying:

*“Hey! Hey! How can you sleep? 咄咄胡為寐*

*Like an oyster or a clam 螺螄蛤蚌類*

*Sleep, sleep for a thousand years, 一睡幾千年*

*But you’ll never hear the Buddha’s name 不聞佛名字.”*

Aniruddha became vigorous and didn’t close his eyes for seven days and nights, causing him to lose his eyesight. However, the Buddha then taught him the “Vajra Illumination Bright Samadhi 照明金剛三昧”, which enabled him to clearly see the three thousand worlds as if they were in the palm of his hand. Thus Aniruddha was foremost in the Heavenly Eye.

There were over sixteen Arhats in the assembly. Among other things, they acted as:

1. Influencing assembly 影響眾: e.g. their presence validates the importance of the Dharma being transmitted.
2. Recipient assembly 當機眾: they are there to directly receive and benefit from the teachings.
3. Adornment assembly 莊嚴眾: their presence adds pomp and fanfare.

## Explained by Master YongHua

### THE ASSEMBLY OF BODHISATTVAS

**Together with all the Bodhisattvas, Mahasattvas: Manjushri, Prince of Dharma; Ajita Bodhisattva, Gandhastin Bodhisattva, Nityodukta Bodhisattva, and others such as these, all Great Bodhisattvas, and together with Shakra, Chief among Gods, and the numberless great multitudes from all the heavens.**

**Together with all the...** Not only were there Sound Hearers in the audience, there also were Bodhisattvas in attendance who needed to hear the Pure Land Dharma Door.

#### **Bodhisattvas:**

**Bodhisattvas** can appear as left-home or lay people. They have no definite appearance. They could be from other worlds and can go everywhere to help living beings. Arhats are attached to Nirvana with residues. Gods and humans are attached to existence. Only Bodhisattvas neither choose to dwell in Nirvana nor are they confused by existence and thus they represent the Middle Way.

They are the second group in the Great Assembly. They embody the mind of compassion: they are there to support the Pure Land Assembly out of compassion for living beings.

Bodhisattvas belong to two major tracks 二門:

1. Self-benefit 自利: Their consciousness and emotions have not ended yet 識情未盡. They take great

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wisdom as foremost 大智為首.

2. Benefit others 利他: They take great compassion as foremost 大悲為先. They look upon living beings as just the same as themselves, choosing to forgo personal leisure and comfort in order to work toward providing relief to living beings' suffering. They take all sentient beings' hardships and heartaches as if they were their own, without any discrimination.

“Bodhi” means enlightened, namely seeking transcendental wisdom. “Sattva” means sentient, referring to the object of their quest: liberating all sentient beings without discrimination. All the Bodhisattvas have made vows that can be classified according to the four vast vows:

1. To cross over boundless living beings.
2. To sever the inexhaustible afflictions.
3. To study the countless Dharma Doors.
4. To certify to the Unsurpassed Way.

The **Mahasattvas**' reputation is well known throughout the ten directions. They are at least Eighth Ground. They all possess a great mind for the Way. Here, Maha can be translated as great, and carries four meanings:

1. Vow 願大: They made vast vows in their quest for Bodhi.
2. Practice 行大: They possess great conduct by working to benefit themselves and others.
3. Time 時大: They go through great lengths of time to fulfill their work.

## Explained by Master YongHua

4. Virtue 德大: They are replete with all the virtues of the One Vehicle.

### Manjushri 文殊師利

In Sanskrit, the name Manjushri has the meaning “wonderful and lucky 妙.”

According to the Avatamsaka school, Manjushri symbolizes faith, practice and wisdom. Faith is foremost because it is the mother of all virtues. Because he benefits all living beings alike without regard to whether they are friends or foes, Manjushri is considered “Wonderful and lucky.” He would never cause beings to incur losses or get afflicted.

Manjushri can also be translated as “wonderful virtue 妙德.” His name is replete with the wonderful virtues: hearing it can eradicate the Four Grave Offenses 四重等罪.

Manjushri was the teacher of all seven Buddhas of the Worthy Eon. He has already attained Bodhi and is named Dragon Species Venerated King Buddha 龍種上尊王佛. Now he is in the northern direction, becoming a Buddha called Jeweled Accumulation 寶積佛.

When he was born, ten auspicious signs manifested to indicate that his virtues and merit were complete and his wisdom was foremost:

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1. The room was filled with bright light 光明滿室, representing that his Prajna wisdom can disperse all darkness.
2. The vessels were filled with sweet dew 甘露盈庭, representing the fact that he can use the sweet dew Dharma to rescue living beings. For example, when sweet dew is sprinkled on ghosts' heads, it immediately gets rids of their offense karma and helps them obtain a good rebirth.
3. The seven jewels welled forth from the earth 地涌七珍 for his use.
4. The gods opened their treasuries 神開伏藏. Wheel-turning sage kings have the seven treasuries: the golden wheel, white elephant, jade woman, horse, as-you-wish pearl, minister of the army and the gods who guard his treasuries. These treasuries were buried in the earth long ago and forgotten. Upon Manjushri's birth, the guardian gods opened these treasuries again.
5. Chickens gave birth to phoenixes 雞生鳳子. These are auspicious birds. To see one brings very good luck.
6. Pigs gave birth to dragons 豬孩龍胎.
7. Horses gave birth to unicorns 馬產騏驎, another auspicious animal. When Confucius was born, a unicorn appeared. His mother tied a string around its neck. Near the end of his life, some hunters killed a unicorn with a string around its neck. Confucius saw it and knew that it would not be long before he would die.

## Explained by Master YongHua

8. Cows gave birth to cais 牛生白驛. A white cai is an extremely rare and auspicious animal. It looks like a horse but has the hooves of an ox.
9. All the grain in the granaries turned into gold 倉變金粟.
10. Elephants with six tusks appeared 象具六牙.

These ten symbolize the ten paramitas.

Manjushri Bodhisattva is called the **Dharma Prince**, because toward the Buddhadharma he has already attained self-mastery. Like the other Bodhisattvas, he “enters the proper position”: he invigorates the Buddha seeds and will eventually succeed in the Dharma King (Buddha) position, just like the crown prince succeeding to the king’s position. He is the leader of all the Bodhisattvas.

He came to support the Pure Land Dharma Assembly. Because the Pure Land Dharma Door is truly inconceivable, it would take the foremost in wisdom Bodhisattva to be able to certify and understand it. Shariputra represents the Provisional wisdom while Manjushri the Actual wisdom. It took both the foremost representatives of these two types of wisdom to provide a foundation for the Pure Land Dharma Door for transforming oneself and transforming others.

*Question:* This Mahasattva has already perfected his vows and practices. He has his own Buddhaland where he crosses over living beings. Why would he neglect his own Buddhaland and show up in the Saha world?



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*Answer:* Buddhas operate differently than we do. They do not discriminate between their own Buddhaland and other Buddhas' Buddhlands. This Mahasattva exhibits great kindness and compassion in going to our Saha world to help Shakyamuni Buddha propagate the Pure Land Dharma Door. You should not doubt such magnanimous and selfless acts of the enlightened beings!

**Ajita**

阿逸多

Ajita means “invincible 無能勝.” He is none other than Maitreya “kind clan 慈氏” Bodhisattva. He specializes in cultivating the Compassionate Mind Samadhi: no matter how badly he is treated, he still maintains a mind of compassion toward all living beings. In the past, he was of the Brahmin class called All Wisdom 一切智 and cultivated kindness for eight thousand years. Also during the time of Tisya Buddha 弗沙佛, he and Shakyamuni both came, brought forth the resolve for Bodhi and constantly cultivated the dharma of kindness. The Compassionate Flower Sutra 悲華經 says that he made the vow that during the time of the War Eon 刀兵劫, he would protect all living beings. Because of his compassion and extreme kindness for the living beings of the chaotic late eons, Ajija appeared in the world. All the Small Vehicle practitioners cannot defeat him, which is why he is named invincible.

When his mother was pregnant with him, her attitude

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changed. She became very compassionate toward all living beings and showed great kindness towards those who were in difficulty. That prompted a physionomist to proclaim that it was all due to the child's virtue. That was why he was thus named as being of the kind clan. At birth, he had the full 32 hallmarks, his body was of purple-golden color, and his comportment and attitude were particularly noble and extraordinary. Now that the causes have matured, he showed up at this Pure Land Assembly to demonstrate his support for the Pure Land Dharma Door.

He is the next Buddha, presiding over the Dragon Flower assembly and will cross over innumerable living beings. Right now he is in the Tushita Heaven Inner Court awaiting his time.

To cultivate the Compassionate Mind Samadhi, one must first practice patience. Ajita wrote a verse:

*The Old Fool wrapped in ragged clothes* 老拙穿衲襖  
*His belly is filled with bland food* 淡飯腹中飽  
*He mends holes to keep him warm* 補破好遮寒  
*Accords with the myriad conditions* 萬事隨緣了  
*If someone scolds the Old Fool* 有人罵老拙  
*He accepts it calmly* 老拙只說好  
*If someone gives him a beating* 有人打老拙  
*He rolls over and sleeps* 老拙自睡倒  
*Spit on my face* 唾在我面上

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*I'll let it dry by itself* 憑它自乾了  
*I save my strength* 我也省力氣  
*You avoid getting afflicted* 你也無煩惱  
*This kind of paramita* 這樣波羅蜜  
*Is a jewel amongst the wonderful* 便是妙中寶  
*If you know of this* 若知這消息  
*Why worry about failing to accomplish the Way*  
何愁到不了？

To accord with conditions is: 事來則應, 事去則靜  
When something manifests, reflect it; after it's gone, return to stillness.

### Gandhastin/Nityodukta

乾陀訶提菩薩/ 常精進菩薩

**Gandhastin** means “never resting 不休息.” Since many eons ago, he has been practicing benefiting others and has not rested even for a single moment. The world has boundless worrisome dusts. Living beings create countless offenses. The love river is bottomless and its waves are endless. Realizing that, this Bodhisattva does not have the heart to even take a break from his rescue work.

This is in the spirit of the Vajra Sutra, which states, “Whether born from eggs, womb, moisture and transformation, up to and including those not with thoughts, not without thoughts, I

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will make them all enter the Nirvana without residues and realize Extinction.” Similarly, in the Shurangama verse, Ven. Ananda made the vow, “If a single living being has not accomplished Buddhahood, I vow not to enter Nirvana.”

### Nityodukta

Nityodukta means being “ever vigorous 常精進” in thought after thought, without laziness. The Chinese term for vigor consists of two characters 精進. 精 means not mixed, the result of the absence of falseness. 進 means to proceed or to get closer, as a result of understanding the principles. This particular Bodhisattva would go through countless kalpas just to save one living being; he would never have a thought of giving up on anyone.

This pair of pitying sentient beings and practicing vigor 愍物策勤 urge each other on for limitless kalpas. Not resting and ever vigorous denote the same meaning. Their practice is just the same: they seek the Buddha’s wisdom from above to benefit and rescue living beings below. Wisdom and compassion are both employed.

Although there are many more Bodhisattvas, only four are mentioned because they symbolize the three requisites:

1. Manjushri symbolizes faith. The Pure Land Dharma Door is truly inconceivable, only those with great wisdom can bring forth the faith.
2. Ajita represents vows. In the past, this Bodhisattva

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met with Great Kindness Thus Come One 大慈如來, and made the vow to practice great kindness and immediately obtained the Kindness Mind Samadhi 慈心三昧. He is mindful of all living beings, wishing them to be born to the Western Bliss Pure Land and obtain limitless life and light just like Amitabha Buddha.

3. Gandhastin and Nityodukta represent practice. This pair constantly practices benefiting living beings over long time spans. Now they practice reciting the Buddha's name, thought after thought, vigorously without rest because they have already obtained the one mind unconfused samadhi.

**And others such as these, all Great Bodhisattvas.** There are countless other Mahasattvas practicing the ten thousand conducts who also are present to adorn the Pure Land Dharma Assembly. They represent the vast and great assembly of compassion.

At the phenomenon level, their gathering denotes great causes and conditions 事是大因緣. They are never apart from the Triple Jewel, which provides the great causes and conditions for accomplishing Buddhahood. Furthermore, to often be able to encounter the Buddha and listen to the Dharma, be instructed on the Buddha's knowledge and wisdom and to draw near the sangha are also great causes and conditions.

At the noumenon level, their presence symbolizes the Secret

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Treasury 理是祕密藏. They have already obtained the Buddha's knowledge and wisdom.

Finally the presence of these great sages reminds us not to miss the opportunity to utilize this Dharma Door that is the faster track to Anuttara-Samyak-Sambodhi.

### Sakra 釋提

Sakra is also called Indra, referred to in the Shurangama mantra as Yin Tuo La Ye 因陀囉耶. His name means “able heavenly ruler 能天主.” In the future he will also become a Buddha called No Attachment Venerated Buddha 無卓遵佛.

Indra was a woman in the time of Kashyapa Buddha 迦葉佛. She made the resolve to build a stupa, and got 32 others to help. As a result, they all were reborn to the Trayastrimsa Heaven, where they became the inner ministers 內臣. In the Trayastrimsa Heaven, there are eight heavens in each of the four directions surrounding the main heaven in the center.

**Chief among Gods,** Shakra came with his own retinues of gods and goddesses.

**And the numberless great multitudes from all the heavens,** includes the rest of the heavens in the Desire Realm

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such as the Suyama Heaven, Tushita heaven, etc...

Lowest in the Desire Heavens is the Four Heavenly Kings Heaven. Each is ruled by one of the so-called outer ministers 外臣 of Lord Shakra:

1. Eastern Maintaining the Country Heavenly King 東方持國天王: His palace is made of gold.
2. Southern Increasing Heavenly King 南方增長天王: His palace is made of lapis lazuli.
3. Western Wide Eyes Heavenly King 西方廣目天王: His palace is made out of white silver.
4. Northern Erudition Heavenly King 北方多聞天王: His palace is made out of crystals.

These four Heavenly Kings command the eightfold division of ghosts and spirits and support and protect the worlds.

The Form Realm no longer has male and female because they have purity and have left behind sexual desire.

The Formless Realm has no more form: they forsake it in favor of emptiness. They have no form skandha.

Gods and humans are listed last because:

1. They have worldly marks (with outflows).
2. They are a mixed lot, including mortals as well as sages; e.g. the eightfold division includes many Bodhisattvas.
3. They act as outside Dharma protectors.

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**The numberless great multitudes from all the heavens:** Innumerable gods and goddesses, asuras, humans and non-humans, ghosts, spirits, etc... came from the ten directions. This is how wide the Pure Land Dharma's effects are: no living being is excluded.

This concludes the foreword portion of the Sutra. It was spoken without request because this Dharma Door is so wonderful that even the sages themselves do not know about it.

The Buddha's wisdom is without fault. He saw that this Dharma Door is appropriate for this wide range of listeners. He spoke of it in order to give the benefits of the four kinds of complete giving **四悉檀**, which are:

1. Mundane Complete Giving **世間悉檀**: Enabling living beings to obtain bliss and benefit. Hearing of the Western Bliss Pure Land where Amitabha Buddha right now teaches the Dharma, we feel happy.
2. Curative Complete Giving **對治悉檀**: Enabling living beings to eradicate evil. If one does as told, practicing pure conduct and continually reciting the Buddha's name, one will be able to extinguish the evils from three karmas of body, mouth and mind.
3. Universal Complete Giving **為人悉檀**: Enabling living beings to produce goodness. Hearing that one can obtain rebirth to his land by reciting his name, we recite in earnest. The act of recitation produces incon-



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ceivable goodness, blessings, virtue and causes and conditions.

4. Primary Meaning Complete Giving 第一義悉檀:  
Enabling living beings to enter the principles. After reciting the Buddha's name for a while, one's recitation gongfu becomes deeper, eventually facilitating one to enter samadhi and awaken to the profound principles.

## THE PRINCIPLE PROPER

### ***Explaining Pureland's Proper and Dependent adornments to bring forth faith and joy***

*Sutra Text:*

**At that time, the Buddha told the Elder Shariputra: From here, passing through hundreds of thousands of millions of Buddhalands to the west there is a world called Utmost Bliss. In this land a Buddha called Amitabha right now teaches the Dharma.**

*Sutra Commentary:*

**At that time, the Buddha told the Elder Shariputra:**  
This inconceivable Dharma Door will inevitably cause skepticism because of its depth. 圓融。乃圓通融洽。無障無礙。即以心佛明之。心性圓滿周遍。不妨佛性。亦滿亦遍。一切法性。皆滿皆遍。佛性法性。圓滿周遍亦然。彼此無障無礙

Breadthwise, it can universally gather in the three roots:

1. Greed, anger and stupidity.
2. Superior, medium and inferior.
3. The Confused, those of Two Vehicles and the Bodhi-sattvas.

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In addition, the Pure Land Dharma Door can perfectly encompass and surpass all the other Dharma Doors. It is most profound and difficult to believe. That is why the Buddha chose to explain it to Ven. Shariputra, who is foremost in wisdom among his Arhat disciples. Without wisdom and sufficient blessings, one cannot help but be skeptical.

Even those who have opened their Heavenly Eye cannot see this. Shakyamuni spoke without being asked, wishing the Sound Hearers to open their Dharma Eye, see the Pure Lands, serve the Buddhas of the ten directions and extensively study the Bodhisattva path.

*Question:* Why address Shariputra and not a Bodhisattva?

*Answer:* Bodhisattvas have eliminated defilement seeds and can reside in the Pure Lands. Sound Hearers still discriminate and the impure lands differ widely. To inform the Sound Hearers' leader can cause them joy and make them admire this superior Dharma.

*Question:* Why only Shariputra and not the other Sound Hearers?

*Answer:* The Buddha decided to start with teaching the teachers.

**From here, passing through hundreds of thousands of millions of Buddhalands to the west there is a world called Utmost Bliss.**

“Passing through ten billion worlds” symbolizes subduing the ten servants/afflictions. The number ten symbolizes the

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many: multiply by ten to reach increasingly large numbers. This symbolizes the manner in which the mind becomes pure by surpassing the limitless afflictions, thus purifying the land. This is what Amitabha did while he was Dharma Treasury Bhikshu: he made 48 great vows to purify his afflictions in order to save living beings.

There are twenty layers of world seeds. The Saha world and Western Bliss Pure Land are both at layer thirteen. That is why we go horizontally from our world in the western direction to get to Amitabha's.

A Buddhaland is also called the Three Thousand Great Thousand Worlds.

Each world system has at its center a Mount Sumeru (Sanskrit for “wonderfully high”) made of four jewels, a moon and a sun. Each of the four directions has a continent. Then the mountain and continents cluster is surrounded by a great ocean that is 84,000 yojanas wide.

The eastern continent is called Purvavideha 弗婆提, meaning “superior body.” This continent is named for the inhabitants' superior bodies. They are eight elbows 肘 tall, and live to be 250 years old.

The western continent is called Aparagodaniya 瞿耶尼, meaning “cattle goods.” There they use cattle as goods. This continent is named for its animals. In addition, the humans there are sixteen elbows tall and live to the age of 500 years.

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The southern continent is called Jambudvipa 閻浮提, meaning “superior gold”, and is named after a tree. The sap of this kind of tree flows into water and turns sand and stones into a special kind of gold that is even better than normal gold. Humans in this continent are 3.5 elbows tall and live to be less than 100 years old.

The northern continent is called Uttarakuru 單越, meaning “superior place” 勝處. This continent is superior to the other three. People there are 32 elbows tall and live to be 1,000 years old.

These four continents are surrounded by a steel mountain range that is outside of the great ocean that encircles the four continents.

Everything is illuminated by a moon and sun, located half way up Mount Sumeru, which is 42,000 yojanas tall—at the same level as the Four Heavenly Kings heaven.

All of the above makes up “a small world system 一小世界”, also called “one set of four continents under heaven 一四天下.”

Above are Six Desire Heavens and the First Dhyana Heaven. One thousand small world systems of the above are called a Small Thousand World System.

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One thousand Small Thousand World Systems is called Middle Thousand World System (at the very top of which is the Third Dhyana Heaven).

One thousand Middle Thousand World Systems is called a Great Thousand World System (at the very top is the Fourth Dhyana Heaven).

And Three Thousand Great Thousand World Systems form a Buddhaland.

*Question:* Why to the west?

*Answer:* This is not a good question! You might have asked why it is to the east if that's what the Sutra said!

The Western Bliss Pure Land's original Sanskrit word is Sukhavati 須摩提, which means "Utmost Bliss" as well as "Peaceful Growth 安養", "Peaceful and Blissful 安樂" or "Pure and Peaceful 清泰." The names differ slightly but the principles are the same. In the Pure Land, there is no birth and death, no afflictions, no pain and suffering and no danger. There is only sheer happiness and bliss. One eternally leaves the multitudes of suffering and secures the most peaceful and stable livelihood.

**In this land**, there is a teaching host: **a Buddha called Amitabha** who **right now teaches the Dharma**. **Amitabha** means "limitless light." He is also called Amitayus, Sanskrit for "limitless life." This Buddha is still teaching the Dharma (in the present). This is unlike our world where Shakyamuni

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Buddha already taught the Dharma and Maitreya will teach the Dharma in the future.

Bodhisattvas see purity while living beings see defilements. Therefore, unlike living beings' worlds, the Bodhisattvas and Buddhas' Pure Lands are not destroyed by the calamities.

Pure Lands such as the Western Bliss Pure Land serve to gather in living beings. Impure Lands such the Saha world are for subduing living beings.

We should further discuss the purity and defilements of the four types of Pure Land that are present in the Western Bliss Pure Land:

1. Ordinary Beings and Sages Cohabiting Pure Land 凡聖同居土. Let's discern the marks of purity and defilements of this kind of land. The Shurangama Sutra describes turbidity as throwing mud into clear and settled water. The Saha world has the five turbidities and thus is defiled. The Western Bliss Pure land in contrast is like muddy water that has settled and is therefore pure.
2. The Pure Land of Expedients with Residues 方便有餘土, also called Transformation City. This is attained by cultivators of the Two Vehicles. It is also inhabited by those who have not broken through to ignorance. They have already emptied their self and thus are pure. This part of the Western Bliss Pure Land is therefore considered pure.

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3. Actual Reward without Obstructions Pure Land 實報無障礙土. This Pure Land is very adorned. Even Bodhisattvas of Equal Enlightenment stay here. It is also pure.
4. Permanently Still and Bright Pure Land 常寂光土:

This is the Pure Land of the Buddhas.

The Western Bliss Pure Land's first kind of Pure Land is pure and thus is unique in all Buddhalands. For example, in our Saha world, we also have ordinary people and sages cohabiting, but it is not considered to be a Pure Land because ordinary people lean toward creating offenses. They do not like to cultivate and often draw disasters and difficulties upon themselves.

Our bodies are from the uniting of various karmic obstructions. The Buddhas are different:

1. The Buddhas' Dharma Body is from the uniting of the principles 積聚理法. The principles are equal without distinction and are present everywhere. That is why the Dharma body is everywhere present.
2. The Buddhas' Reward Body is from the purification of all doubts and the perfection of wisdom 惑淨智滿, taking wisdom as its body. In fact, it manifests from the later acquired wisdom 此從後得智所現, referring to the Bodhisattva's developed wisdom after they acquired Prajna wisdom. Those of Two Vehicles cannot see the Reward Body with their eyes.
3. The Buddha's Response Body, or Transformation Body, is from the union of all living beings' conditions



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積聚機緣。 Thus when living beings' conditions or roots ripen 機緣成熟, the Buddhas appear in response and take on the form of living beings in the various nine realms, adorned with the 32 hallmarks and 80 subtle characteristics.

Although there are three bodies, they are actually just one: from the same substance that manifests differently according to conditions.

Amitabha Buddha is therefore a transformation body in the Ordinary and Sages Cohabiting Pure Land.

Those wishing to be reborn to the Western Bliss Pure Land should cultivate three types of blessings:

1. To be filial to their parents, to serve teachers and elders, practice kindness, not to kill and to practice the ten good deeds.
2. To take refuge with the Triple Jewel, to observe the precepts and not to violate the comportments.
3. To bring forth the Bodhi mind, to deeply believe in cause and effect, to read and recite Mahayana sutras, and to encourage others to draw near and practice the Dharma.

These are the three proper causes and conditions for rebirth to all the Pure Lands.

**There is** has four meanings:

1. It's for real: This is to cause living beings to admire and seek rebirth to that Pure Land.
2. These are true words: They can make the listeners become single-minded.

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3. What is described is not the Illusory City. It is not an illusion. It is not a provisional manifestation or a conditioned appearance or false reflection. It is free from attachments to the two extremes. It can destroy the demons, and the Provisional or Small Vehicle attachments.
4. It is a perfect manifestation of the true nature that one can certify to.

### **Right now teaches the Dharma:**

This refers to the proper and dependent retributions, not the past, not the future. This Buddha is constantly teaching the Dharma, unlike in our Saha world where Shakyamuni has already finished speaking Dharma. We must wait for quite a while until Maitreya appears in the world to speak Dharma. Therefore, quickly go to the west, draw near Amitabha Buddha, horizontally escape the Triple Realm and learn the Great Vehicle Dharma from the Buddha and Bodhisattvas.

Again:

1. “There is”: Indicating now, reaffirming faith.
2. “Western Bliss Pure Land”: It does exist; therefore make the vow to be reborn there.
3. “Amitabha”: He is the current teaching host. Therefore, vigorously practice, recite his name and seek his help in being reborn to his Pure Land.

*Question:* The bliss in all the Pure Lands of the ten directions is the same. Why do you recommend rebirth to the Western Pure Land and not the other Pure Lands?

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*Answer:* Ordinary people have heavy karma. They are greedy for everything. If we don't give them a target, they cannot focus. That's why the Lotus Sutra says, "Living beings grasp everywhere. They should be led to liberation. Furthermore, the host of the Western Pure Land has superior vows that are particularly strong. We should take advantage and exhort living beings to ride on his vow power to obtain rebirth."

*Sutra Text:*

**Shariputra, why is this land called Utmost Bliss? All living beings of this country never suffer, but enjoy every bliss. Therefore it is called Utmost Bliss.**

*Sutra Commentary:*

**Shariputra, why is this land called Utmost Bliss?** Now Shakyamuni Buddha expands on "Utmost Bliss" so as to enable the listener to bring forth the faith.

The Buddha both asks the question and answers it because even though Shariputra is foremost in wisdom, he still has no clue and does not know what to ask.

**All living beings of this country never suffer, but enjoy every bliss.**

**Living Beings** are made up of the five skandhas of form, feeling, thought, formation and consciousness. One could also say that they are born from the union of all the Dharma marks. The body itself arises from the false union of the four great elements and belongs to the *Form* skandha. The first

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five consciousnesses recognize the five dusts, and make up the *feeling* skandha. The sixth consciousness climbs on the six dusts' conditions and creates differentiation, therefore manifesting as the *thought* skandha. The seventh consciousness, is constantly evaluating, as thoughts follow one another ceaselessly. That is the *formation* skandha. And finally, the eighth consciousness stores the body and dependent retribution seeds. It is just the *consciousness* skandha. All living being have these elements, from the lowliest up to the Bodhi-sattvas of the Equal Enlightenment position.

All living beings of this Buddhaland know no suffering because they are born by transformation and maintain purity in their lives. Here in the Saha world, on the other hand, we are born by emotions, and consequently experience both suffering and happiness; we are adept at bearing all the suffering.

If we can obtain rebirth to the Western Bliss Pure Land, our lifespan will be limitless, we have all six spiritual penetrations and will be able roam throughout the Dharma Realm with ease. Our heavenly clothes and food will be abundant and arrive as we wish. We will have no suffering at all. Day and night, we can listen to the Dharma and experience only the Dharma bliss.

In the Pure Land, their bliss is unsurpassed. They experience only bliss unlike in our Saha world where our suffering and bliss are all mixed together! How's that for happiness?

Is it news to anyone that suffering is self-inflicted?

Speaking of suffering, it can be of three types:

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1. Suffering within suffering: Our body is the suffering retribution. We then undergo suffering on top of it.
2. Suffering of decay: In the Saha land, the nature of our happiness is short-lived. In other words, in our world, happiness or bliss is a type of suffering of decay. It is sad to realize that, in our world, there is no real happiness or bliss! It is kind of hard to accept isn't it?
3. Suffering of the life process. This is neither of the above two. We renounce the feeling skandha and feel neither suffering nor pleasure. And yet no one can avoid the formation skandha's ever changing flow. "Formation" refers to changing without rest and ultimately ending up in extinction.

There is a beautiful anecdote of the mark of this type of suffering. Confucius was by a stream. He sighed and said, "It flows like this, unceasingly day and night!"  
孔子在川上曰。逝者如斯乎。不捨晝夜。  
即借水寄嘆。”

Ultimately, when we speak of the bliss in the Western Pure Land, it is in reference to the suffering of our Saha world. In particular, it is for the sake of creating the yearning to avoid the Saha world's suffering and wishing to be reborn in the Land of Utmost Bliss. We can talk of the ten pairs of suffering and bliss opposites:

1. In the Saha world, we have the constant difficulty of encountering the Buddha whereas in the Western Pure Land, living beings meet with Amitabha as soon as their lotus flower blooms. Thus living beings live in a

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- state of bliss because they have the ability to often draw near the Buddha.
2. Here, we have the suffering of not hearing the Buddhadharma. There, living beings obtain the bliss of having the water, bird and trees all proclaiming the Dharma.
  3. The Saha world has the suffering of evil companions leading us astray and/or drawing us to the dark side. There, all beings have the bliss of being in a gathering of only good and superior people.
  4. Here, we have suffering arising from the multitude of demon hordes from the outside and afflictions from the inside. In the Western Bliss Pure Land, living beings experience the bliss from the Buddha's mindful protection and are shielded from demonic manifestations.
  5. Here we have the suffering of getting caught up in the unceasing wheel of reincarnation. There, they horizontally escape birth and death and escape reincarnation forever.
  6. Here, we have the suffering of easily sinking into the three evil paths. There, living beings have the bliss of forever escaping the three evil paths. They don't even hear of the names of those three paths!
  7. This world has the suffering of obstructions to cultivation arising from the dust conditions 塵緣障道之苦. There, they have no such difficulties.
  8. Here, we have the suffering of a short life cycle that is full of hardship. There, living beings' life span is just as long as the Buddha's, which is limitless.
  9. Here we have the suffering of regression and abandonment in cultivation. There, living beings all are re-

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plete with the proper samadhi. They also have the bliss of non-regression.

10. Here, we have the suffering of the extreme difficulty in attaining the Way. There, they accomplish Buddhahood in one lifetime, experiencing the bliss of being able to accomplish what is to be done.

In the Saha world, we have the death of share section 分段死. Share 分 refers to the limitation of the lifespan 分限,壽命長短. Section 段 refers to the size, height or length of the body. In the Western Bliss Pure Land, they have no such suffering. They are transformationally born from the lotus flower and obtain their last body. They will accomplish Buddhahood in one lifespan and therefore have no more share section birth and death.

Speaking of the eight kinds of sufferings, keep in mind that:

1. In the Western Bliss Pure Land, they do not have the suffering of birth, having to stay for nine months in the womb and being born in a painful manner. Instead, they experience the bliss of being born by transformation from a flower.
2. They have no aging suffering. They all have the bliss of owning perfect features and body.
3. They have no sickness suffering. In contrast, they obtain self-mastery and security.
4. They have no suffering from the breaking apart of the four great elements, that is death. Instead, they obtain the bliss of a limitless lifespan.

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5. There, they have no suffering from being apart from their loved ones. In fact, they have the bliss of being part of the sea-vast assembly of sages and worthy ones.
6. There is no suffering of being with those that one detests. Instead, they can draw near those of superior roots.
7. They have no suffering of not getting what they want. Indeed, they all obtain the bliss of naturally accomplishing things as they wish.
8. They have no suffering of the raging five skandhas. Instead, they illuminate their skandhas and see that they are all empty and thus obtain bliss.

*Question:* That land has no suffering, why is it called Utmost Bliss?

*Answer:* To contrast it with the impure lands like ours where we experience “utmost suffering.” That did seem to have inspired quite a few living beings to seek rebirth there.

*Question:* Ordinary people loathe defilements and admire purity and tend to abandon suffering in favor of bliss. Why then call this the perfect sudden Dharma Door? Bodhisattvas themselves do not seek Nirvana’s bliss and will not abandon rescuing living beings from their suffering. In fact, as far as Bodhisattvas are concerned, they are attached to neither suffering nor bliss; attachments to both grasping and abandoning are severed—this is the spirit of Mahayana. Why then are those who recite the Buddha’s name seeking rebirth not of the same mindset?



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*Answer:* To obtain the Patience of the Non-production of Dharmas is still not enough to rescue living beings. It is like a broken vessel that is sinking: both oneself and others cannot escape danger. We recite the Buddha's name to seek rebirth to his land, to see him and listen to him speak Dharma, and to obtain the Patience of Non-production of Dharmas. Once we have accomplished this, then we will be able to go to all the Buddhalands to rescue living beings in order to perfect benefiting self and others. According to this strategy, to abandon the suffering of the Saha world is none other than seeking to rescue living beings from suffering. Thus, seeking rebirth to the Western Pure Land is the Bodhisattva's mindset. Furthermore, to seek bliss is to ultimately be able to give bliss to all living beings, so that too is the Bodhisattva's great mindset. In contrast, the Small Vehicle practitioners are primarily concerned with their own welfare. Can that be called perfect sudden Dharma?

*Question:* Does the Western Bliss Pure Land belong to the Triple Realm?

*Answer:* No, because:

1. There is no desire there and hence no Desire Realm.
2. The residents of the Western Bliss Pure Land dwell on the ground and therefore there is no Form Realm.
3. Furthermore, the residents have form and therefore do not belong to the Formless Realm.
4. Finally, all residents there have already transcended the Triple Realm: inside they create no defiled seeds, outside they are not confused by the externals. They have escaped the reincarnation wheel and permanently transcended the Triple Realm.

## Explained by Master YongHua

In the Land of Utmost Bliss, living beings obtain food and clothing simply by thinking of them. There is no need to labor for them!

Thus far we have examined the suffering and bliss of the first kind of Pure Land: where commoners and sagely ones cohabit.

Let us now look into the second kind of Pure Land: those which have expedients with residues. In our world, advanced cultivators may experience the suffering of one-sided emptiness and stillness extinction 偏空寂滅之苦. In contrast, in the Western Bliss Pure Land, the residents are not stuck in one-sided emptiness and stillness. They have the bliss of roaming spiritual powers to purify the Pure Lands and aid living beings.

As for the Pure Land of Actual Reward Adornments, Bodhisattvas there all entered through one mind and the three contemplations. Although the Dharma Realm has no distinction, the ignorance habit energies are lighter there and their contemplative wisdom is strong and sharp, unlike here in the Saha world where, though the three contemplative wisdoms are complete, the habit energies are still heavy and wisdom has slight imperfections. That is why it's called an impure land. Thus, in the Pure Land of Actual Reward Adornments, Bodhisattvas receive inconceivable and unobstructed bliss.

實報莊嚴土：若從次第三觀所感，則雖證道同圓，而無明習重，智慧稍鈍，名之為穢。若從

## Small Amitabha Sutra

一心三觀所成，則雖法界無別，而無明習輕，智慧猛利，名之為淨。

The Ultimate Still Bright Pure Land is the state of the Buddha's bliss. In contrast, our Saha land only pertains to the separate teaching where, although the first twelve ignorances are eradicated, the bliss is still not ultimate. Counting from the First Ground Bodhisattva to Buddhahood, there are twelve grades of ignorance that must be eliminated.

*Sutra Text:*

**Moreover, Shariputra, this land of Utmost Bliss is completely surrounded by seven tiers of railings, seven layers of netting, and seven rows of trees, all formed from the four treasures, and for this reason called Utmost Bliss.**

*Sutra Commentary:*

**Moreover, Shariputra, this land of Utmost Bliss is completely surrounded by seven tiers of railings, seven layers of netting, and seven rows of trees, all formed from the four treasures, and for this reason called Utmost Bliss.**

Next, the Buddha describes the dependent retribution of the Western Bliss Pure Land. Even Ven. Shariputra has never seen these types of adornments before.

All the adornments that can be seen by the Saha inhabitants are created from causes and conditions. They are all conditioned and are with-outflow dharmas. In contrast, all the adornments that can be seen by residents of the Western Bliss

## Explained by Master YongHua

Pure Land are created from Amitabha's blessings and virtues. Hence they are all unconditioned and are without-outflow dharmas.

**Railings** is a translation of the Chinese *lán* 欄, representing horizontal barriers, and *shǔn* 楯, representing vertical barriers. These railings adorn the borders and boundaries, symbolizing precepts.

**Netting** is a translation of the Chinese *luó wǎng* 羅網. In the Western Pure Land, netting adorns empty space, representing concentration.

**Trees** is a translation of the Chinese *háng shù* 行樹. In the Pure Land, trees adorn the roads and grounds. Each tree has seven layers of netting, all made from the treasures. Between the netting there are five billion wonderful flowers and extremely adorned palaces. The trees represent wisdom. Each layer interlaces with the next.

**Seven:** Stands for seven classes, the classification of the 37 wings of enlightenment into seven groups:

1. Four Applications of Mindfulness
2. Four Right Efforts
3. Four Bases for Spiritual Powers
4. Five Roots
5. Five Powers
6. Seven Limbs of Enlightenment
7. Eight-fold Path

## Small Amitabha Sutra

**Formed from the four treasures** of gold, silver, lapis lazuli and crystal. These four represent the four virtues of Nirvana (permanence, bliss, true self and purity). Or one could say that these four treasures represent the four Dharmas of Attraction that Amitabha Buddha uses in order to gather in living beings.

In fact, the jewels are not limited to seven or four. They are layers upon layers of innumerable jewels.

For example, when the Sutra talks of golden trees, it means that everything is made of gold: the roots, tree trunk, branches, leaves, flowers and fruits. In addition, there are trees with golden roots and silver trunks, where the branches, leaves, flowers and fruits are made of the two gems of gold and silver. There can be various combinations of the seven kinds of jewels.

The Contemplation Sutra provides details on the seven rows of trees. Each tree is 8,000 yojanas tall. Each flower and leaf is made of different kinds of jewels and colors. Rays of golden light radiate from those of lapis lazuli, and red light emanates from those of crystal, etc... There are nets of precious pearls covering the trees. Each row of trees has seven kinds of nets. Between each net, there are five hundred million wonderful flowers and palaces. And this sutra only gives a brief description!

Speaking of adornments:

1. In the Commoners and Sages Cohabiting Pure Land, the adornments are a response from superior good karmas. They also arise from the five grades of con-

## Explained by Master YongHua

- templation. Their substance is the condition-produced superior and wonderful five dusts.
2. In the Expedients Pure Land, the adornments are a response from the Emptiness contemplation wisdom. They are also a response from the three similar contemplations 亦相似三觀所感. Their substance is the Wonderful Emptiness Truth five dusts.
  3. In the True Actual Reward Pure Land, the adornments are a response from the Wonderful Mundane Contemplation Wisdom. They are also a response from the partial certification of the three contemplations 亦分證三觀所感. Their substance is the Wonderful Mundane Truth limitless five dusts.
  4. In the Eternally Still Bright Brightness Pure Land, the adornments are a response from the Middle Contemplation. They also arise from the Ultimate three contemplations 亦究竟三觀所感. Their substance is the Wonderful Middle Truth named nature five dusts 以妙中諦稱性五塵為體.

All adornments in this Western Bliss Pure Land are discerned to make it easier for living beings to understand. In fact, of the adornments in the four Pure Lands, all are produced from cause and condition dharmas, all are from the Emptiness, Mundane, and Middle contemplations. That is why in the Western Bliss Pure Land cohabiting purity, Emptiness and the Mundane are perfectly fused without any limit.

## Small Amitabha Sutra

*Question:* The Still Bright Pure Land is just the principle nature 寂光惟理性, how can it have adornments?

*Answer:* Each and every adornment substance is totally the principle nature 一一莊嚴全體理性, each and every principle nature is replete with all adornments 一一理性具足莊嚴, just like all the Buddhas' ultimate dependent retribution 方是諸佛究竟依果. If the Still Bright Pure Land were not replete with the superior wonderful five dusts, it would not be different from the one-sided emptiness dharma nature.

The inhabitants of the Western Pure Land are endowed with the eight great freedoms of the self:

1. One body can manifest limitless bodies.
2. One body the size of a dust mote can completely fill the great thousand world systems.
3. The great body can float or fly to distant places.
4. One can manifest limitless kinds of living beings.
5. All sense organs are used interchangeably.
6. One can obtain all dharmas without the thought of any dharma being obtained. This is described as “no wisdom, no attaining” in the Heart Sutra.
7. The meaning of one verse can be explained in limitless eons.
8. The body pervades all places like empty space.

*Question:* The railings, nets and rows of trees are seven-layered. Why seven and not another number?

## Explained by Master YongHua

*Answer:* This symbolizes that those who get reborn there all obtain the seven limbs of enlightenment. Their body, mouth and seven karmas have no flaws because they are endowed with the seven sagely treasures.

*Sutra Text:*

**Moreover, Shariputra, in the land of Utmost Bliss are pools of the seven jewels, filled with the waters of eight meritorious qualities; the bottom of each pool is pure, covered with golden sands. On the four sides are stairs of gold, silver, lapis lazuli and crystal. Above are raised pavilions adorned with gold, silver, lapis lazuli, crystal, mother-of pearl, red pearls and carnelian.**

**In the pools bloom lotuses as large as carriage wheels with colors of green light, red light, yellow light, and white light, subtle, rare, fragrant, and pure. Shariputra, the Land of Utmost Bliss is adorned with splendor and virtues such as these.**

*Sutra Commentary:*

We've just finished describing the land or place where living beings reside in the previous section. This section details the natural lotus pools where living beings are born.

**Moreover, Shariputra, in the land of Utmost Bliss are pools made of the seven jewels.**

The seven jewels are:

1. Gold, which comes in up to five colors, with yellow/gold being the best quality. Gold can be buried a



## Small Amitabha Sutra

long time without any damage. It can be worked without losing its properties. Also, it is produced between dirt; that is why the Chinese character for gold has the dust character at its center 金.

2. Silver.
3. Lapis Lazuli 琉璃, which also has five colors.
4. Crystal 玻璃. The Wisdom shastra says that crystals are stones that came from grottos in the mountains. They were frozen for one thousand years before becoming crystal. However, in the Pure Land, there is no cold or heat, and the earth never freezes up. How can crystals be formed? Even though crystal is a type of stone, it is not real stone.
5. Mother of pearl 砗磲.
6. Red pearl 赤真珠.
7. Carnelian 瑪瑙.

Our Saha world has stones and gravel that comes about from our with-outflow deluded karmas. In the Western Bliss Pure Land, the jewels are from the non-outflow pure karmas. The Large Amitabha Sutra gives us more details: it states that inside, outside, left and right all have pools of lotuses as large as ten yojanas up to twenty or thirty yojanas. Some pools are even as large as ten thousand yojanas. Some are as large as the ocean. Each pool is made of one, two or up to seven jewels.

### **Filled with the waters of eight meritorious qualities**

The water of the pools has eight meritorious virtues:

## Explained by Master YongHua

1. Tepid 清冷: It is warm or cool to each individual's liking. In contrast, in our Saha world, water can be quite cold or hot.
2. Clear 澄清: It does not ever get dirty, unlike our Saha world, where water can be dirty and turbid.
3. Pure 甘美: It tastes sweet and delicious. Here, our water can be salty, bland or inferior tasting.
4. Soft 輕軟: It feels light and soft, as compared to our water which can be hard and heavy.
5. Moistening 潤澤: It washes dirt right off. In contrast to our water which can be foul smelling, its taste can change over time, its color can change over time, and its stagnancy can allow germs to proliferate.
6. Harmonizing 安和: This water makes your heart and mind be at peace as opposed to our rushing and sometimes violent waters.
7. Banishing hunger and thirst 除饑渴.
8. Nourishing all roots 長養諸根, as opposed to our waters which can harm all roots, drown people and allow illnesses to multiply.

The water there is not just endowed with eight virtues; it actually has numberless virtues. The Contemplation Sutra states that each pool is made of the seven jewels. Each jewel is very soft, born from the as-you-wish pearl king. The pools branch out into fourteen streams. Each branch has the seven jewel colors, its many colored water flows between the flowers and speaks the Dharma of suffering, impermanence, no-self and emptiness.

## Small Amitabha Sutra

The Limitless Life Sutra says that when those good and superior rooted living beings enter those pools, the water's temperature changes to cool or warm, according with their individual wishes. Furthermore, the water can make them become open-minded and at ease in their bodies. It can help them get rid of the impurities of their minds while cleansing their physical bodies. This kind of water has no mark because it can accord with living beings' wishes. Its virtues are truly inconceivable.

Unlike the water of our world which can either dry up or cause flooding, this water is just right. It is of the appropriate depth for each individual. For example, if one wishes to wash the upper torso, the water level naturally rises. When done, it automatically lowers to the knee level to allow for washing the lower legs. The water is exactly as one wishes.

The water in the pools flows gently, neither fast nor slow. Its surface is riddled with countless tiny waves. There are natural sounds of reciting the Buddha's name, literary wisdom Dharma sounds 或聞法聲, literary wisdom sanghan sounds 或聞僧聲, still and quiet sounds, emptiness and no-self sounds, great kindness and compassion sounds, Paramita sounds, as well as multitudes of other wonderful Dharma sounds. Whatever Dharma one wishes to hear can be heard. Hearing the sounds will give rise to a mind of purity, bring one's roots to maturity and obtain non-regression from unsurpassed Bodhi. Although the water is intrinsically insentient, it can nonetheless speak such inconceivable Dharmas and speak of the Paramitas.

## Explained by Master YongHua

After bathing in the water, some might sit on the lotus dais or some might sit on the ground to speak sutras, read sutras, learn sutras, receive sutras, listen to sutras, recite sutras, contemplate the Way, sit in meditation or practice walking meditation. Some could be doing such activities in space as their abilities allow them to do so. Those who have not yet obtained the fourth fruition of Arhatship can obtain it, thanks to those practice causes. Those who have not reached non-regression Bodhisattva grounds can thereby reach them. The water is just a touch dharma, and yet it can have such inconceivable qualities!

**The bottom of each pool is pure, covered with golden sands.** There is only a brief description of the bottom of the pool. The Contemplation Sutra gives more details: the golden sands really have many-colored Vajra gems. The Large Amitabha Sutra (which will also be referred to as simply The Large Sutra) says that the bottom of each pool actually has all sorts of jewel sands.

Each pool is as large a hundred great seas. The carriage wheels on the chariots of the Wheel Turning Sage King are one yojana in diameter. A small yojana is forty miles, a middle yojana is sixty and a large yojana is eighty miles. Each lotus is eighty miles in diameter. The pools may look like water but feels as if there is nothing at the touch. The water is sublimely fragrant.

## Small Amitabha Sutra

**On the four sides are stairs of gold, silver, lapis lazuli and crystal.** The pools are surrounded by pathways which are made from the four gems.

**Above are raised pavilions adorned with gold, silver, lapis lazuli, crystal, mother-of pearl, red pearls and carnelian.** Many tall palaces have multiple stories and are situated between the pools and above the flowers. There are countless numbers of these palaces.

Stairs allow for ascension to pavilions where the sangha lives and where the Dharma is spoken. The Limitless Life Sutra states that Amitabha Buddha's Dharma hall is adorned with the seven jewels. For example, the palaces of the sixth desire heaven are adorned with the seven jewels, and are a hundred thousand ten thousand times more adorned than in the human realm. Moreover, the Bodhisattvas' palaces are also a hundred thousand ten thousand times more adorned than the heavenly palaces. Here the same multiplier applies.

Gold is listed first because of its four virtues:

1. Its body is durable.
2. Its nature is soft and malleable.
3. Its color is bright.
4. It is expensive and prized.

**In the pools bloom lotuses as large as carriage wheels with colors of green light, red light, yellow light, and white light, subtle, rare, fragrant, and pure.** The four color lotuses emit light representing the Four Applications of Mind-

## Explained by Master YongHua

fulness, the Four Right Efforts and Four Bases for Spiritual Powers.

The four colors that are emitted are:

1. Blue, for the Utpala 優鉢羅, a Sanskrit term for blue lotuses symbolizing the Ten Dwellings.
2. Yellow, for the Kumuda 拘勿頭, symbolizing the Ten Practices.
3. Red, for the Padma 鉢頭摩, symbolizing the Ten Transferences.
4. White, for the Pundarika 芬陀利, symbolizing the Ten Grounds.

The four colors therefore represent the forty positions and causal virtues 四十位因德. They thus come about from the fruition. The four colored lotuses are thus the fruition responses 果感四色花.

The Contemplation Sutra says that there are limitless jewels that adorn those **carriage wheel** lotuses in the Western Bliss Pure Land. Each lotus pool has sixty hundred million lotuses of the seven jewels. The Large Sutra says that each lotus ranges from one yojana to one thousand yojanas.

Each lotus is of a different size depending on the gongfu of each reciter. The more one recites, the bigger it becomes, proportional to one's recitation ability. On the other hand, if one stops reciting, it shrivels and dies. At the time of death, one is reborn onto this lotus. This is why it is said that we are reborn to the Pure Land with lotus flowers as parents. It is a

## Small Amitabha Sutra

pure form of birth. When the lotus flower opens, we immediately get to see Amitabha Buddha.

The carriage wheel here has the meaning that this Dharma can reach throughout the ten directions to ferry living beings back to the Western Bliss Pure Land for rebirth, relying on Amitabha Buddha's great powers. Only four colors are mentioned but in actuality, there are limitless colors.

*Question:* Why only mention four colors?

*Answer:* These are four colors which are actual and not false. They symbolize the fact that the inhabitants of Western Bliss Pure Land do not flatter, or use tortuous words. They can accomplish the four kinds of Nirvana and obtain the four Wisdoms.

### **Subtle 微, rare 妙, fragrant 香, and pure 潔:**

These qualities symbolize the four virtues of the lotuses:

- “Subtle” reflects the quality and substance and not the shape. Each lotus manifests various forms depending on one's strength of mindfulness.
- “Rare” means unobstructed: Having self-mastery without obstructions is a reflection of living beings' recitation gongfu.
- “Fragrant”: It is more fragrant than our world's fragrance. On the causal grounds, Amitabha was replete with the fragrances of the three non-outflow studies: precepts, samadhi and wisdom. Now at the fruition of his cultivation, the lotuses' fragrance is inconceivable.

## Explained by Master YongHua

- “Pure” denotes that it’s not defiled by dusts. It reflects our pure and wonderful Bodhi mind.

The lotus concept is rather special. It denotes the following:

- A place of residence, unbounded (unlike walled within palace grounds) and serving as a shelter for the wisdom life.
- The Western Bliss Pure Land is often called the Lotus Country.
- The Pure Land Dharma Door is often called the Pure Land Sect.
- The Recitation Assembly is often referred to as the Lotus Society.
- The co-cultivators are often called lotus companions.

**Shariputra, the Land of Utmost Bliss is adorned with splendor and virtues such as these:** All the adornments are accomplished from Amitabha Buddha’s great vows and great practices. They arise from his merit and virtues!

**Adorned 成就**, refers to Amitabha Buddha’s ability to accomplish 能 the afore-mentioned pools, pathways, palaces, pavilions, lotuses, etc 所.

**Such as these** refers to the various states of use retribution such as the water qualities, pool sizes and shapes etc...

Speaking of adornments, Amitabha’s 32<sup>nd</sup> vow says, “If I become a Buddha, from the ground to the sky, everything will be made of the limitless jewels, replete with the hundred



## Small Amitabha Sutra

thousand kinds of fragrance. All will be extremely adorned; exceeding those of the heaven and human realms. Their fragrance will pervade the ten directions. All the Sound Hearers and Bodhisattvas will practice the Buddha Way. If not so, I will not accomplish the Way.” Afterwards, he spent asamkhyeya kalpas practicing the Bodhisattva path (great practices). In fact, The Large Sutra says that in the causal ground, Amitabha Buddha selected 21 hundred million Buddhalands’ purification practices when he was in front of World Self-Mastery King Buddha.

Amitabha Buddha made great vows and accomplished all his profound practices. Living beings can simply ride on them by reciting his name and thus also accomplish the same kinds of merit and virtues.

At the noumenon level, all the adornments come from his mind which is not separate from all living beings.

The Buddha starts out by immediately describing the land of Utmost Bliss (dependent retribution) in order to inspire faith in the listeners.

*Question:* Why do the Western Buddha and sages seem to be greedy for flowers and beauty? Are they advocating beauty? In our land, the sages and worthy ones stay in thatched huts. They avoid palaces, preferring small quarters. Some even live in alleys or slums. Here, we honor their virtues and do not value their adornments. Those who understand are not impressed with styles or appearances.

## Explained by Master YongHua

*Answer:* The adornments are the fruition of Amitabha Buddha's vows. They are also a response from the pure conduct of superior and good people. They do not require special efforts or labor. Furthermore, the inconceivable adornments are the result of Amitabha Buddha's use of expedients. He accords with living beings' natural abhorrence of defilements and admiration of purity. He therefore created the Western Bliss Pure Land so as to induce living beings of the ten directions to desire the abandonment of suffering and seek bliss. They therefore bring forth the faith, make vows and recite his name to seek rebirth to his land and thus horizontally escape samsara. This is such a beautiful expedient that typifies the edict:

“First lure with desire and then later make them enter the Buddha's wisdom 所謂先以欲鉤牽。後令人佛智。”

This is what Great Master Hui Yuan refers to as: if one is in the midst of difficulties, hunger and cold and suddenly hears of a place where one can be safe, well-fed and have warm clothes, one cannot help but feel elated and jump up and down with joy, renounce the old and seek the new environment. Because one who obtains rebirth will also obtain liberation, the Pure Land Dharma Door is an example of a greeting and guiding expedient 方便接引。

**Virtues** refer to non-outflow-nature virtues. The nature is fundamentally replete with all adornments. It cannot be realized without the Buddha's power. Amitabha Buddha perfect-

## Small Amitabha Sutra

ed his practices to adorn the Western Pure Land which can create conditions with living beings. Living beings use these conditions to adorn the Pure Land and give rise to abhorrence of the impure lands, wishing to leave them. They then engage in pure karmas and can be reborn from their own and other's power. Outside of the nature, subject 能 and object 所 cannot be attained:

- Subject: Amitabha can maintain. Object: the Western Bliss Pure Land can be maintained.
- Subject: Amitabha's virtues can adorn. Object: the Western Bliss Pure Land can be adorned.
- Subject: Amitabha can adorn. Object: the Western Bliss Pure Land can be adorned.

There are three types of worlds:

1. Insentient 器世間: the Western Bliss Pure Land.
2. Sentient 有情世間: Living beings.
3. Proper Enlightenment 正覺世間: The Buddha.

These three worlds can be united into one substance called Proper and Dependent (retributions) as One (True) Suchness 依正一如. Self and other are not dual 自他不二. All of the Buddhas are living beings 全佛即生. All others are the self 全他即自.

*Sutra Text:*

**Moreover, Shariputra, in this Buddhaland heavenly music always plays, and the ground is made of gold. In the six periods of the day and night a heavenly rain of mandara-va flowers falls, and throughout the clear morning, each**

## Explained by Master YongHua

**living being of this land offers sacks filled with myriads of wonderful flowers to the hundreds of thousands of millions of Buddhas of the other directions. At mealtime they return to their own countries and after eating they walk about. Shariputra, the Land of Utmost Bliss is adorned with splendor and virtues such as these.**

*Sutra Commentary:*

**Moreover, Shariputra, in this Buddhaland heavenly music always plays, and the ground is made of gold.** The Sutra then illustrates the superior state of the five dusts in the Western Bliss Pure Land: music (sound), ground (form), flower (form and smell), food (taste) and sacks of flowers/walking about (touch).

The dusts of the Pure Land are subtle whereas those of our Saha world are coarse. This is because our minds are coarse therefore the dusts are coarse. When the mind is subtle, the dusts are correspondingly subtle.

Unlike our world, in the Western Pure Land **music** always plays nonstop. Heavenly music fills empty space. Music refers to all the various musical instruments, suspended on trees or banner poles, all playing in a symphony that speaks Dharma, causing the listeners to give rise to good thoughts. Music has two meanings:

1. Heavenly music offered up to the Buddha and assembly of sages.
2. Natural music which does not need human intervention and yet is naturally harmonized.

## Small Amitabha Sutra

**And the ground is made of gold** on top, beneath which are the seven jewels. The inhabitants all emit light and therefore there is no need for light from the moon or sun. Unlike our Saha world, the Western Pure Land has no night since it is always bright.

**In the six periods of the day and night**, three in each, **a heavenly rain of mandarava flowers falls**. In our Saha world, it rains in the south and snows in the north whereas in the Pure Land, it rains lotuses. As the flowers fall upon the ground, periodically the wind will automatically blow, cleaning the ground of the flowers.

**Mandarava flowers** 曼陀羅 translates into “as you wish 適意” or “white flower 白花.” They are usually rained down by heavenly beings, symbolizing making offerings. Mandarava flowers are heavenly flowers that are quite rare in other lands. ‘Flower’ represents all the other offerings, consistent with one of Universal Worthy Bodhisattva’s ten limitless practices of widely practicing giving.

As documented in the Dharma Flower Sutra, flowers have four virtues:

1. They adorn the Pure Land symbolizing that in that land, good dharmas are utilized to adorn the body.
2. The lotus flower blooms 敷榮見臺. This symbolizes the Buddha wishing to reveal the One Vehicle Dharma, the true Dharma.
3. First flower, later fruit 先華後果。表生彼國先因後果故. The cause comes first and is then fol-

## Explained by Master YongHua

lowed by its effect, symbolizing that rebirth to the Pure Land is the effect that followed from the previously planted causes of the past.

4. The fragrance is far reaching, making those who inhale it become delighted and blissful. This represents the fact that the virtuous karmas and highly regarded reputation are far reaching throughout the ten directions.

That is why it rains flowers.

*Question:* What does the Pure Land's white flower rain symbolize?

*Answer:* That only white karmas are practiced there. White is the basis for all colors, just like the One Vehicle is the source of all dharmas.

**And throughout the clear morning, each living being of this land offers sacks filled with myriads of wonderful flowers to the hundreds of thousands of millions of Buddhas of the other directions.** Everyone is free to go as they please to make offerings to all the Buddhas of the ten directions.

They use **sacks** 衣裓 not only of white flowers but of all kinds. There are also Maha Mandarava, great white flowers, and Mañjūsaka 曼殊沙華 and Maha Mañjūsaka 摩訶曼殊沙華, great soft flowers.

They go to other worlds to offer flowers and listen to the Buddhas in those worlds speak the Dharma. In our Saha world, we are just too busy earning a living, fighting for fame

## Small Amitabha Sutra

and profit. In contrast, the residents of the Western Pure Land are busy making offerings to the Buddhas, bowing to the Buddhas and practicing the paramitas.

The four kinds of lotus flowers are used as offerings to the Buddhas of the other directions. This represents making sincere offerings to the Buddha fruition at all times, everywhere.

**The hundreds of thousands of millions:** this is referring to the number of Buddhlands that had to be crossed to get to the Western Bliss Pure Land from the Saha world. Therefore, once in the Pure Land, we can always come back to make offerings to Shakyamuni and Maitreya Bodhisattva any time. Actually, we can go anywhere to make offerings thanks to Amitabha's spiritual powers; we can go anywhere in the ten directions as quickly as a finger snap.

**At mealtime they return to their own countries and after eating they walk about.** This clearly demonstrates the fact that all the inhabitants of the Western Bliss Pure Land have incredible spiritual powers, in particular, they possess the spiritual foot 神足通. They can go to very faraway places to make offerings, yet still be able to make it back in time to eat. This is from Amitabha Buddha's vow number 23, that all Bodhisattvas, relying on his spiritual powers, can in one instant go make offerings to the myriad Buddhas of the ten directions.

This kind of spiritual penetration can be divided into three kinds:

## Explained by Master YongHua

1. One can get there **能到**: The body can fly or walk to faraway places. One can levitate effortlessly and go to distant places.
2. One can change **轉變** into a small or big body, into one or many bodies.
3. A sagely as-you-wish state **聖如意**: One can transform and manifest as one wishes. One can make inconceivable transformations in order to respond and accord with living beings. Without leaving the Western Land, one can nonetheless be present in the lands of all directions.

To be able to go to distant Buddhalands (to make offerings) really means:

1. The Western Pure Land and the other Buddhalands are really not that far from each other.
2. One does not give rise to the total exhaustion samadhi **不起滅盡定** and yet one can manifest all sorts of awesome deportments **現諸威儀**, just as the moon is instantaneously and simultaneously reflected on many water surfaces.

They can rapidly return to the Western Country from the lands of the ten directions. This is kind of spiritual penetration is a response of their pure conduct. It is also sustained by Amitabha Buddha's power.

At a deeper level, this really means that each sound, each dust, and each ksana, including a snap of the fingers, is connected to the Triple Jewel of the ten directions without ob-



## Small Amitabha Sutra

structions. This is a manifestation of phenomenon not obstructing phenomenon 事事皆無障礙法界. The substance of the Western Bliss Pure Land is the Dharma Realm and encompasses the Triple Jewel of the ten directions. Conversely, the substance of the Triple Jewel of the ten directions is just the Dharma Realm and thus encompasses the proper and dependent retributions of the Western Utmost Bliss Pure Land. It is just like the pearl network of Shakra. Each pearl encompass many pearls. Many pearls also encompass each pearl. One and many mutually encompass each other without obstruction.

In fact, in the Saha world, our turbidity is rather deep and heavy and our evil karmas create many obstructions. Therefore, although we are not separate we do feel separate; the Western Land seems so far away! In contrast, in the land of Utmost Bliss, the merit and virtue are profound and therefore although it is separate, it does not feel separate. This is not different from the state of sages and mortals: separate and yet not separate 隔而不隔!

At meal time, when they thinking of **eating**, food comes by itself, thus they can receive the natural bliss of eating. There is no need to prepare food or arrange the table. The food automatically fills up the bowl with the right amount. There is no need to wash after eating. The Large Amitabha Sutra states, “At meal time, golden bowls, silver bowls, all sorts of precious bowls appear as one wishes, filled with the hundreds of flavors catering to each individual’s likings.” The food is as varied and delicious as you wish, yet it does not cause attachment as in our world.

## Explained by Master YongHua

How do they know when to eat? A golden bell sounds by itself when it's time. Everyone hears the sound and gathers.

Why do they still have to eat? In the Actual Reward Pure Land, they use the Chan bliss as food. In the Transformation Pure Land, they rely on food to sustain the body.

**After eating, they walk about in:**

1. The Buddha Hall 繞寶殿
2. The beautiful forest 繞瓊林
3. Or simply back and forth

Their feet walk while their mouths recite sutras.

After eating, they actually practice walking meditation and do not simply waste time walking! They contemplate the Buddha's instructions enabling wisdom to manifest. Therefore, they equally practice blessings and wisdom. In fact, they never waste time, but are always applying themselves in cultivation.

This kind of cultivation state is extremely blissful:

1. The Large Sutra says that the wind spontaneously blows from the four directions and produces the 500 types of sound, blowing through the flowers and trees. The flowers' fragrance is therefore disseminated by the gentle wind in all directions. Even the nature of the metals is warm and soft.
2. The ground is flat. There are neither mountains nor seas. There are no pits, valleys or dark places.

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3. When our roots are faced with the dusts, we still remain in bliss.
4. That kind of bliss does not obstruct the Way but rather assists the Way.

*Question:* In the Western Pure Land, the environment is superior, people have put an end to ignorance, and the land has no day or night. How can one tell the time?

*Answer:* A golden bell resonates by itself or jade bells shake themselves, creating an impression of dawn. Some of the birds rest at night in the forests (i.e. they stop singing to indicate night time). The Bodhisattvas also create time and darkness manifestations which are far superior to indications of time in our world.

**Shariputra, the Land of Utmost Bliss is adorned with splendor and virtues such as these.** The Buddha reminds Ven. Shariputra that all of the adornments, splendor and virtues of the Western Land, such as heavenly music and flowers, spiritual traveling back and forth, food and walking meditation, etc., are adornments resulting from Amitabha Buddha's vows, practices, merit and virtues.

*Sutra Text:*

**Moreover, Shariputra, in this country there are always rare and unusual birds of many kinds and colors: white cranes, peacocks, parrots, egrets, kalavinkas and two-headed birds. In the six periods of the day and night the flocks of birds sing forth harmonious and elegant sounds.**

## Explained by Master YongHua

**Their clear and joyful calls proclaim the Five Roots, the Five Powers, the Seven Bodhi Shares, the Eightfold Path of Sages, and dharmas such as these. When living beings of this land hear their calls they are altogether mindful of the Buddha, mindful of the Dharma, and mindful of the Sangha.**

*Sutra Commentary:*

**Moreover, Shariputra, in this country there are always rare and unusual birds of many kinds and colors: white cranes, peacocks, parrots, egrets, kalavinkas and two-headed birds.** There are always (not sometimes!) all sorts of birds, though only six kinds are listed.

**Rare 奇:** Referring to their superior shapes.

**Unusual 妙:** They can speak Dharma.

**Many colored 雜色:** They have colorful plumage.

**White cranes 白鶴** are purely white, representing orthodoxy. Some have red feathers on their heads while the rest of the body is as white as frost. They are very loud and dance very elegantly, unlike the other birds.

**Peacocks 孔雀** capture our attention with their elegant and frail beauty. These birds are innately spiritual and are quite different from ordinary animals. They wear a green crown and have very colorful bodies.

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**Parrots 鸚鵡** have beautiful and colorful bodies as well. Their feathers are emerald in color and their beaks are bright red. Their light feathers endow them with flight. Their tongue is thin and long, enabling them to speak.

**Egrets 舍利** are pretty from a very young age. They can fly very far and soar high. Their sounds are very melodious. They are small and handsome but quite spiritual.

These first four kinds of birds exist in the Saha world.

**Kalavinkas 迦陵頻伽** means “good sounding bird.” It sings more melodiously than any bird even before it has hatched (according to The Great Shastra). Its sound surpasses all those of the human and heavenly (kinnara) realms. Only the Buddha’s voice sounds better. Their bodies are alluring. One cannot help but feel enthralled when hearing their sound. One cannot help but be captivated by their looks and one would never tire of looking at them.

**Two-headed birds** have two heads on one body. They fly very fast and very lightly. They have a human face on a bird body. Husbands and wives who are heavily into sexual desire are reborn with two different consciousnesses in one body, although this retribution could not occur in the Pure Land, which has no animal realm. Rather and the birds there are transformations of Amitabha Buddha. However, these last two kinds of birds (kalavinkas and two-headed birds) exist in the Himalayas.

## Explained by Master YongHua

These birds continuously make sounds all the time. Those residents are born from transformation and do not need to sleep. Nor do the birds sleep, that is why they can also sing at night.

Now, we explain the Dharma sounds. The sutra does not list them all.

**In the six periods of the day and night the flocks of birds sing forth harmonious and elegant sounds. Their clear and joyful calls proclaim the Five Roots, the Five Powers, the Seven Bodhi Shares, the Eightfold Path of Sages, and dharmas such as these.** In that land, the birds sing non-stop, harmoniously as if in a symphony.

The singing 演暢 is done with fluidity and without obstructions.

The 37 Wings of Enlightenment consist of seven groups:

1. Four Applications of Mindfulness.
2. Four Right Efforts.
3. Four Bases for Spiritual Powers.
4. Five Roots.
5. Five Powers.
6. Seven Limbs of Enlightenment.
7. Eight-fold Path.

The Great Wisdom Shastra says that within the 37 Wings of Enlightenment, no Dharma is excluded; there are measureless Dharmas within them.

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The Nirvana Sutra says that if one can contemplate the Eightfold Noble Path, one will see the Buddha nature and obtain awakening.

The Four Contemplations (also known as the Four Applications of Mindfulness) are different in the Pure Land because the inhabitants there do not have defiled bodies, or suffering:

1. Body Contemplation: In the Pure Land, the body is ultimately pure unlike the defiled body that we have here in the Saha world.
2. Feeling Contemplation: The inhabitants all have inconceivable bliss unlike here where we are constantly oppressed by multitudes of suffering.
3. Thought Contemplation: Their minds are true and actual, apart from production, extinction and impermanence.
4. Dharma Contemplation: In the Pure Land, all five skandhas are really one's self, unlike here where the dharmas have no self.

These four have wisdom as their substance.

### Five Roots

The word “root” has two meanings:

1. To be able to sustain 能持, like the roots of trees which can sustain the branches and leaves, without which they would wither and die.
2. To be able to produce 能生 flowers and fruits, which symbolizes bringing to maturity.

The Five Roots are:

## Explained by Master YongHua

1. Faith: In particular, faith in the Orthodox Dharma. This means believing in the Dharmas of the Proper Way (believing that all living beings are basically the Buddha, bringing forth the Bodhi mind and evolving toward Buddhahood) and Dharmas of Assisting the Way (aiding cultivation by practicing all good dharmas and planting the proper causes).
2. Vigor: To practice the Dharmas of the Proper Way and Aiding the Way without rest.
3. Mindfulness: To maintain constant awareness of the Dharmas of the Proper Way and Aiding the Way without any other thoughts.
4. Samadhi: To anchor the mind on the Dharmas of the Proper Way and Aiding the Way without any scatteredness.
5. Wisdom: With regard to Dharmas of the Proper Way and Aiding the Way, one's wisdom clearly illuminates and discerns. Great Master Man Yi 滿益 said, "One should contemplate the Four Noble Truths and enable the wisdom light to manifest. Contemplate the Truth of Suffering and realize that its substance is the Dharma Body. Contemplate the Truth of Accumulation and realize that its substance is just Prajna. Furthermore, the Truth of the Way is the cause for liberation and the Truth of Extinction is the liberation fruition. That is the wisdom root."

These five substances can be the basis for producing goodness.

The Five Roots mature into the **Five Powers**. When the five roots mature, replete with all their powers and functionalities,



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they will not be subdued by other dharmas and can defeat and subdue such dharmas. The Five Powers are:

1. Faith Power: To deeply believe that mind is Buddha 是心是佛 and that the mind acts as Buddha 是心作佛. It makes one capable of destroying living beings' skepticism that they can also become the Buddha. Those who have this faith power cannot be moved by confusion. Deviant teachings cannot confuse and make them upside-down and they can sever afflictions and will not be invaded by them.
2. Vigor Power: To be able to overcome all kinds of bodily and mental laziness, to avoid harboring a view of a body, to valiantly labor and bear suffering, and not to become somnolent 昏昧 or sunk 沉沒. This will enable one to break through mental laziness and accomplish the great transcendental work (of ending birth and death).
3. Mindfulness Power: To destroy all deviant thoughts, including those of one-sided emptiness or of existence, to harbor only proper thoughts, to accomplish the world transcending Middle Way Proper Mindfulness, and to be mindful of all merit and virtues.
4. Samadhi Power: To attain one mind unconfused, to overcome scatteredness and bring forth samadhi. Shallow gongfu will enable one to produce phenomenon samadhi, while deep gongfu will enable one to enter noumenon samadhi.
5. Wisdom Power: When the wisdom light penetrates through all confusion/ignorance, one will be able to produce non-outflow wisdom.

## Explained by Master YongHua

The substance of these Five Powers is the Five Roots.  
These powers are not easily subdued.

**The Seven Bodhi Shares** are also known as the Seven Enlightenment Shares. When the previous Five Wisdom Powers become solid, wisdom develops and one learns how to use it judiciously. Then one can awaken and understand. Those who certify to the proper positions will unfold actual wisdom and will use the following as limbs:

1. Selecting a Dharma 擇法: To be able to discern among the five Skandha dharmas, the false and proper dharmas, the proper ones being those which have no outflows. One will not select the false and erroneous dharmas. What are these wrong dharmas? They are those which mistakenly take the five skandhas as the self. Fundamentally, the five skandhas are untrue dharmas but we incorrectly take them to be true. Marks of self and of dharmas are all false. They are not in accord with non-outflow wisdom. In contrast, the true principle of the emptiness of self and dharmas is in accord with non-outflow wisdom.
2. Vigorously cultivate that Dharma; the Chinese tern is *jīng jìn* 精進. *Jīng* 精 means not mixed, or pure. *Jìn* 進 means not to regress, but rather to progress. One can be clear and aware 覺了 while cultivating, not make the mistake of engaging in unbeneficial ascetic practices that will not transcend birth and death, and vigorously practice the True Dharma. Pure Land practitioners can rely on the abhorrence and admiration Dharma Door to practice reciting the Buddha's name,

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in order to renounce defilements and adopt purity, thus leaving suffering and attaining bliss.

3. Experience joy 喜 derived from practicing that Dharma. After practicing the True Dharma long enough, one will obtain a response from the True Dharma and will be able to clearly understand that the bliss obtained is not from deviant dharmas such as attachment to nihilism, permanence, emptiness or existence. When Pure Land practitioners hear about reciting the Buddha's name to obtain rebirth to the Pure Land, they become elated and they recite as instructed.
4. Casting out 除 coarse delusions, which consist of view delusions and afflictions. The view delusions are body 身, extreme 邊, deviant 邪, view 見, and precept 戒 delusions. These five are called quick servants because they arrive very quickly. The afflictions are greed, hatred, stupidity, arrogance, and skepticism, which belong to thought delusions. These are known as the five dull servants because they are slower to arrive. These ten servants cause living beings to create karma and then undergo retribution, making them revolve in the reincarnation wheel. However, if we can simply maintain the Buddha's name, using that one thought to expel all other thoughts, we will gather in the six sense organs and cause pure thoughts to follow each other.
5. Renouncing 捨 subtle delusion: Once we have cast out the afore-mentioned view and affliction delusions, we become clearly aware that states are false, and are just like a dream. Then we will neither pursue nor value

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them any longer. Pure Land practitioners can earnestly anchor the mind to a Buddha, abandon all kinds of conditions and produce the thought of abhorrence and wishing to leave 厭離 this Saha world.

6. Samadhi 定: The externalists can attain the thoughtless samadhi 無心定 and can suspend the sixth consciousness. As a result, they can be reborn to the Heaven of No-thought, with a life span of 500 kalpas. During the first 499 kalpas they will not give rise to a single thought. However, during the second half of the last kalpa, they will lose their samadhi power and give rise to a thought again. Because they slander the Triple Jewel, they fall to the hells. Some can reach the Neither Thought nor Non-thought Samadhi and enjoy heavenly bliss for 80,000 kalpas, but they too will eventually fall. Those who have not attained the Extinction of Feeling and Thought Samadhi 滅受想定 cannot end birth and death. Only the Proper Dharma can end love and view delusions. Pure Land practitioners aspire to always remain clear and aware that all samadhis are false. This way they will not become attached to the various samadhis. When our recitation of the Buddha's name is deep and solid, our mind becomes still and unencumbered. At this point, the mind will not move, be chaotic, or attach no anything whatsoever.
7. Mindfulness 念: While cultivating the Proper Dharma, one must always maintain a balance between samadhi and wisdom (this is like the two legs in walking, or the birds' two wings, or the cart's two wheels).

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When there is excessive samadhi power, the mind will sink 沉沒. To counteract this, one must become aware and use the first three Bodhi shares: 1) selecting, 2) vigor and 3) joy. At other times, when there is excessive wisdom power, the mind may become agitated 浮動. Then one should use the other three Bodhi shares to counteract the agitation, subduing and harmonizing the mind so that the balance between samadhi power and wisdom power will be restored. That's mindfulness.

The ancient sages say, “If there is a place where there is a Buddha, one should not linger there; if there is a place where there is no Buddha then hurry past it 有佛處不得住，無佛處急走過.” To attain the fruition requires passing through the two critical gates of existence and non-existence so that ultimately one recites and yet does not recite, one does not recite and yet recites.

**Eightfold Noble Path:** These are also called the Eight Sagely Paths. Due to the first of the Seven Bodhi Shares, by selecting the proper Dharma, one does not enter into the deviant paths. The Eightfold Noble Path, on the other hand, is proper and in this context “Path” indicates that it will lead to Nirvana. There are eight components:

1. Proper views 見 of the principles: Not to indulge in views with outflows. One's wisdom eye clearly illu-

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minates and one can see that the principle is proper and true 慧眼分明。見理正確。

2. Proper thoughts 思惟: Such thoughts are based on transcendental wisdom, rather than on the discriminating mind. Proper thoughts tally with the mind of non-outflows and their substance is wisdom. They give rise to words and language that can connect with the thoughts of the Buddha's. Proper thoughts can kick start awakening, understanding and assessment (of the Four Truths), enabling contemplative wisdom to increase. They therefore help sever delusion and certify to the truth, allowing entry to the Great Nirvana.
3. Proper speech 語: To refrain from committing the four evil mouth karmas and indulging in the four deviant mouth karmas, which are 1) direction mouth food 方口食: flattery and "kissing up" to the powers in the four directions; 2) intermediate (directions) mouth food 維口食: using mantras and divination skills; 3) upper mouth food 仰口食: using knowledge of astrology; and 4) lower mouth food 下口食: farming or utilizing medicine. In maintaining proper speech, one does not use the afore-mentioned deviant mouth karmas to seek benefit and earn a living. One therefore does not commit the four evil mouth karmas of false speech, frivolous speech, coarse speech and double-tongue.
4. Proper action (業 referring to body karma): To practice pure Brahman conduct, thus keeping the mind free

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from the three poisons. As the Shurangama Sutra puts it, “One does not kill, steal or engage in deviant sex.”

5. Proper livelihood 命: To have no evil mouth, body or mind karmas. There are five kinds of deviant livelihoods for left-home people: 1) Falsely manifesting a strange style 詐現異相. This means intentionally behaving in a manner that is different from others, for instance by not eating the five grains, lying on nails, walking on fire, or doing “extraordinary” feats in order to inspire others to bring forth faith and admiration. 2) speaking of one’s own merit and virtues 自說功德 to entice or deceive others. 3) Fortune telling 占相 吉凶: one makes divinations, reads omens, makes predictions, or interprets auspiciousness or inauspiciousness. 4) Shouting and bragging 高聲現威 in order to make others become respectful or fearful. 5) Speaking of one’s own offerings 說得供養 to impress others. All these forms of livelihood are deviant means to obtain profit. One should be free from greed for fame or any wish for recognition.
6. Proper vigor 精進: To cultivate Orthodox Dharma without laziness or boredom in a way that is in accord with non-outflow wisdom.
7. Proper concentration or samadhi 定: To always be in proper samadhi thereby not giving rise to deviant views. In this way, one distances oneself from scatteredness, deviant samadhis, and from outflow samadhis, etc.

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8. Proper mindfulness 念: To single-mindedly be mindful of True Suchness and the ten thousand aiding practices, using non-outflow wisdom to expel all false thinking.

**And dharmas such as these.** As previously mentioned, there are many others such as The Four Dharmas of Attraction, The Four Fearlessnesses, The Six Paramitas, The Ten Powers, etc.

*Question:* Why does the sutra not list thought contemplation 念處, proper vigor 正勤, or spiritual foot 神足?

*Answer:* In the Western Bliss Pure Land thought contemplation involves: 1) body contemplation (that the body is pure, being transformationally born from a lotus), and 2) feeling contemplation (that there is no suffering in the Western Bliss Pure Land). Unlike our Saha world, in the Pure Land the body and feelings are not a cause of suffering. For this reason, thought contemplation is not listed in the sutra.

Proper vigor is to contemplate that there is no evil, to refrain from letting any evil arise, and to cut off any evil which may have arisen. However, in the Land of Utmost Bliss everyone has superior roots and therefore no evil arises and there is no need to sever evil. Thus proper vigor is not mentioned in the sutra.

The power of spiritual foot arises from seeking external states 謂於所求境，希向慕樂, hoping to roam and valuing pleasure. However, everything is as one wishes in the West-



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ern Pure Land, so there is no need to seek. Hence the spiritual foot is also not listed in the sutra.

The phrase “and other Dharmas such as these” refers to many additional teachings that are communicated by the birds and other manifestations in the Pure Land. Some of these other Dharmas are:

The Four Dharmas of Attraction:

- 1) Giving 布施: We cannot help living beings with whom we have no affinities, which are also referred to as conditions. Therefore we must first start with giving in order to create good affinities.
- 2) Kind words 愛語: Using soft spoken and endearing words that induce living beings to listen makes them more receptive to receiving help.
- 3) Beneficial practices 利行: We roll up our sleeves and do whatever it takes to bring great benefits to all living beings.
- 4) Same work 同事: Engaging in similar work in a common place together with those we wish to benefit, we thereby practice hidden virtue. In order to succeed at this, we must know how to drift with the current and engage in “bonding” practices.

The Six Paramitas:

- 1) Giving: To cure stinginess and greed.
- 2) Precepts: To cure all evils.
- 3) Patience: To cure anger and hatred.
- 4) Vigor: To cure laziness.

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5) Samadhi: To cure scatteredness.

6) Wisdom: To cure stupidity.

These six are the Buddha's Dharma medicine to heal living beings' mind sicknesses.

Another set of Dharmas that are expounded in the Pure Land are The Ten Powers. All Buddhas have these powers:

- 1) Recognizing Right States and Wrong States Wisdom Power 知是處非處智力: They know all living beings' causes, effects, and retributions. A right state, when cause and effect are in accord, occurs when one does good, thereby obtaining good retributions. On the other hand, a wrong state, when cause and effect seem to be not in accord, occurs when one creates bad karma yet expects a good retribution.
- 2) Karma 業 Wisdom Power: The Buddhas know all living beings' karmas of the three periods of time.
- 3) Samadhi 定 Wisdom Power: They possess all the samadhis, worldly or transcendental (Hinayana and Mahayana).
- 4) Root 根 Wisdom Power: They know all living beings' roots, whether inferior or superior, enabling them to dispense appropriate teachings according to our capacities 隨機施教.
- 5) Desire 欲 Wisdom Power: The Buddhas know all living beings' desires and attachments.
- 6) Realm 界 Wisdom Power: They know the realm of all living beings.

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- 7) Destination 至處 Wisdom Power: They know where each Dharma Door will lead to.
- 8) Past Lives 宿命 Wisdom Power: They know everything that happened in the infinite number of past lifetimes of all living beings.
- 9) Heavenly Eyes 天眼 Wisdom Power: The Buddhas know where living beings came from 從何到來 and where they are going.
- 10) Non-outflow 漏盡 Wisdom Power: Buddhas no longer have to undergo further birth.

In the Pure Land, one will also learn about The Four Fearlessnesses:

1. All Wisdom Fearlessness 一切智無所畏: This entails knowing and seeing all Dharmas exhaustively 盡知盡見. Exhaustively means completely. To know refers to the state of internal completeness in which nothing is not known. To see refers to external completeness: nothing is not perceived. There is nothing that is not seen and there is nothing that is seen that is not understood. When both inside and outside are completely covered, how can there be any fear of falling short in any way?
2. Exhausted Outflow 漏盡 Fearlessness: When all outflows are exhausted, the five dwellings 五住究竟 are ultimate. The five dwellings will be elaborated later. Also, the two deaths, share section and change

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deaths, permanently cease 兩死永亡. Since there are no more outflows, how could there be any fear?

3. Speaking of Obstructions to the Way Fearlessness 說障道 (delusions, karmas and suffering can all create obstructions): Once we know of all of our obstructions and are not afraid to speak about them, we will have mastered this type of fearlessness. Typically, we either have no clue about our obstructions, or we wrongly believe that they are not obstructions.
4. Path to the End of Suffering Fearlessness 苦盡道: This fearlessness requires knowing, without any doubt, all the pathways (practice paths) that can lead to the end of suffering, and being able to explain them all without any fear.

In addition, the Pure Land manifestations teach about The Five Dwellings, which are where afflictions reside. The Five Dwellings, which can also produce afflictions, are:

1. Views dwelling 見一處住地，即身見等三界之見惑，入見道時，併斷於一處: When one enters the Way, the various view delusions of the Triple Realm are all severed at one place.
2. Desire and love dwelling 欲愛住地，即欲界煩惱中，除見、無明，而著於外之五欲（色、聲、香、味、觸）之煩惱: This includes all the afflictions of the Desire Realm, except for views and ignorance. These afflictions arise from attaching

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to the five desires for externals. The externals are forms, sounds, fragrances, flavors and touches.

3. Form love dwelling 色愛住地，即色界之煩惱中，除見、無明，捨外之五欲而著於一己色身之煩惱: This dwelling includes all the afflictions of the Form Realm, except for views and ignorance. At this level, one can detach from the five external objects of desire but one nonetheless still attaches to one's own form body.
4. Existence love dwelling 有愛住地，即無色界之煩惱中，除見、無明，捨離色貪而愛著己身之煩惱: This includes all the afflictions of the Formless Realm, except for those of views and ignorance. At this level, one succeeds in separating from greed for the form body but one is still attached to the remaining bodily afflictions.
5. Ignorance dwelling 無明住地，即三界一切之無明。無明為癡闇之心，其體無慧明，是為一切煩惱之根本: This final dwelling includes all the ignorance of the Triple Realm. Ignorance makes the mind become stupid and dark, and its substance is the absence of wisdom and brightness. Ignorance is the basis for all afflictions.

The Consciousness Only School considers the delusions of the first four dwellings as the seeds for affliction obstructions,

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and the fifth dwelling as the seat for the obstructions of what is known.

The Tian Tai School considers the first dwelling as view delusions of the Triple Realm, the second through the fourth dwellings as thought delusions of the Triple Realm. The Two Vehicle practitioners sever these first four dwelling delusions and thereby transcend the Triple Realm. The fifth dwelling delusions belong to transcendental delusions 界外之惑—; if one can sever these, one can attain the Great Nirvana.

Like the teachings mentioned above, the Four Proper Efforts are not directly mentioned in the sutra text. Also known as the Four Vigors, they are:

- 1) Putting an end to existing evil 斷斷.
- 2) Preventing not yet arisen evil from arising 律儀斷.
- 3) Bringing not yet existent goodness into existence 隨護斷. In particular, it is important to accord with, guard and protect the non-outflow Proper Way so that there is no regression in cultivation and no disappearance of the Dharma, thereby preventing evil dharmas from arising.
- 4) Developing the goodness that already exists 修斷, causing it to grow and severing all evil.

Vigor is also called proper severance 正斷.

The final additional Dharmas which we will mention here are The Four Bases for Spiritual Powers 四如意足, which can

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bring about spiritual powers and help one obtain what one desires. They are:

- 1) Desire 欲: For instance, we admire the Western Bliss Pure Land and subsequently can obtain rebirth there.
- 2) Vigor 精進: The three kinds of non-regression can be obtained through vigor.
- 3) Mindfulness 心/念: In thought after thought, staying mindful of the Bodhi vows and practices.
- 4) Thought 思惟/慧: Through thought, we can deeply enter the Buddha's wisdom, and be at ease and increasingly bright 任運增明.

The Four Bases for Spiritual Powers take samadhi as their substance because they can be used to cultivate spiritual penetrations. The word 'spiritual' is used because one can make unimaginable transformations. Relying on samadhi power, one can use one's mind in inconceivable ways. The word "Base 足" indicates that that these powers can be relied upon. Relying on samadhi power one can obtain spiritual transformations.

In general, living beings have limitless afflictions and illnesses. Therefore, the Buddha speaks of limitless Dharma Doors as medicine to counteract these afflictions. The teaching is thus dispensed according to living beings' varying conditions and potentials.

The 37 wings of enlightenment are different for each of the teaching periods (which are based on the writings of Great Master Zhi Zhe 智者 of the TianTai school):

## Explained by Master YongHua

1. The Store Teaching 藏教: This period refers to the three stores teaching of the Hinayana, while the remaining three teachings belong to Mahayana. The store teaching is also called the half-word teaching 半字教. Hinayana teaches about the production and extinction Four Noble Truths 生滅四諦. Samadhi arises from these Four Truths. The Truth of Suffering indicates that the three marks of production, dwelling and extinction are constantly changing. The Truth of Accumulation teaches that greed, anger and stupidity, and the four minds all change and move. The four minds are: (1) the flesh mind 肉團心; 2) the conditioned and thinking mind 緣慮心, 眼、耳等八識, 具有緣慮之作用; 3) the accruing and arising mind, which is the eighth consciousness that accumulates the seeds which in turn drive manifestations and behavior 集起心, 第八識; 以其能積集種子而生起現行, 故稱之為集起心; and 4) the solid and true mind 堅實心, 指真如心. The Truth of the Way can deal with and resolve change and encroachment. The Truth of Extinction indicates that both extinction and existence return to emptiness.  
苦諦。則生住滅三相流遷。集諦。則貪瞋癡等分。四心流動。道諦。則對治易奪。滅諦。則滅有還無。



## Small Amitabha Sutra

2. The Connective Teaching 通教: This teaching period is the entry Dharma Door to Mahayana, and is reserved for those with sharp roots. Sutras from this period teach about the non-production Four Noble Truths 無生四諦. The Truth of Suffering teaches that suffering is an illusion or a transformation without any mark of oppression. The Truth of Accumulation is also an illusion without any uniting marks. However, the Truth of the Way has the mark of non-duality and the Truth of Extinction has the no-production mark. 苦諦如幻如化。無逼迫相。集諦。如幻如化。無和合相。道諦不二相。滅諦無生相.
3. The Separate Teaching 別教: This set of teachings is only for Bodhisattvas and therefore is separate from the previous Connective Teaching and the subsequent Perfect Teaching. Sutras from this period teach the boundless Four Noble Truths 無量四諦. The Truth of Suffering has numberless marks because the retributions in the ten realms are all different. The Truth of Accumulation also has numberless marks because the five dwelling afflictions are not the same in the various realms. The Truth of the Way has numberless marks because the Buddhas and Dharmas, both of which are as numerous as the Ganges' sands, are all different. Finally, the Truth of Extinction states that the Parmitas are all different.

## Explained by Master YongHua

苦諦。有無量相。十界果報不同故。集諦。有無量相。五住煩惱不同故。道諦。有無量相。恆沙佛法不同故。滅諦。諸波羅密不同故。

4. The Perfect Teaching 圓教 teaches the Non-action Four Truths 無作四諦 (The Primary Meaning Truth 第一諦): Everything is the true mark of True Suchness and requires no action. The Truth of Suffering states that the five skandhas are fundamentally the Treasury of the Thus Come One. Hence, there is no suffering that can be ended. The Truth of Accumulation states that affliction is just Bodhi, and thus there is no accumulation that can be severed. The Truth of the Way says that the extreme and the deviant are all the Middle Way, the Proper Way. Therefore there is no Way that can be cultivated. The Truth of Extinction says that birth and death are just Nirvana, and hence there is no extinction that can be certified to.

苦諦。五陰本如來藏。無苦可離。集諦。煩惱即菩提。無集可斷。道諦。邊邪皆中正。無道可修。滅諦。生死即涅槃。無滅可證。

**When living beings of this land hear their calls they are altogether mindful of the Buddha, mindful of the Dharma, and mindful of the Sangha.** The Buddha has no fears and can explain all Dharmas. In the Western Bliss Pure Land, all

## Small Amitabha Sutra

the sounds speak Dharma. Living beings can obtain great benefits and naturally become mindful of the Triple Jewel by listening to them:

1. Amitabha Buddha is both kind (he wants to attract and gather in 攝受 all living beings) and awe-inspiring (he is able to subdue beings with his awesome virtues 折服之威). Hence the residents are constantly aware of the Buddha's presence and of his virtues: this is mindfulness of Buddha.
2. Mindfulness of the Dharma: Listening to the Dharma, naturally the mind becomes peaceful and blissful, making us remember what was heard and wanting to hear more.
3. Mindfulness of the Sangha: When we are able to draw near Good Knowing Advisers and receive instructions for cultivation, we can then certify according to the various milestones. We are naturally mindful of our teacher's kindness, guidance and protection.

The Triple Jewel should be venerated because:

- The Buddha Jewel is complete in wisdom and virtue.
- The Dharma Jewel frees us from desire.
- Sangha Jewel is the field of blessings.

Dwelling and maintaining the Triple Jewel 住持:

- The Buddha should be maintained by making images out of gold, silver, or wood; in addition, images could also be carved or molded.
- The Dharma should be adorned in yellow, organized into rolls, and grouped into The Tripitaka.

## Explained by Master YongHua

- The Sangha should be adorned, pure, and propagate the teachings.

The Triple Jewel is of one substance: it arises from the self-nature. The Buddha Jewel is the magical enlightenment substance nature 靈覺體性. It is perfect, bright, and exhaustively illuminating 圓明照了. The Dharma Jewel is the nature replete with limitless extolling-the-nature merit and virtue 稱性功德. The Sangha Jewel is the non-duality of the principles and wisdom 理智不二, united and harmonious, devoid of contradiction 和合無違 (no fighting, and not violating the teachings).

This one substance 一體 is the Triple Jewel of the self-nature. The mark of the nature is the One Suchness 性相一如 (both the nature and its marks are just one True Suchness), not separate, yet separate 不分而分, free of discrimination and yet appearing to discriminate, dual yet not dual 二而不二, seemingly relative but really not relative.

Sangha is Sanskrit for united and harmonious assembly. Sanghans practice the six harmonies of:

1. Body: They dwell together 身和共住.
2. Words: They do not fight 語和無諍.
3. Mind: They engage in the same work 意和同事.
4. Precepts: They co-cultivate 戒和同修.

## Small Amitabha Sutra

5. Views: They have the same understanding 見和同解.
6. Benefits: They share resources equally 利和同均.

*Question:* The multitude of birds speak Dharma and the inhabitants are only mindful of the Triple Jewel. All speak the One Vehicle Dharma. Could anything be more wonderful and extraordinary?

*Answer:* The birds, trees, wind and water all speak Dharma, representing the inexhaustible. Men are mindful of the Triple Jewel, which is replete with all goodness.

*Sutra Text:*

**Shariputra! Do not say that these birds are born as a retribution for their offenses. And why not? Because in this Buddhaland the three evil paths do not exist. Shariputra, even the names of the three evil paths are unknown in this Buddha's land; how much the less could they actually exist! Wishing to proclaim the Dharma's sound far and wide, Amitabha Buddha created this multitude of birds by transformation.**

*Sutra Commentary:*

**Shariputra! Do not say that these birds are born as a retribution for their offenses. And why not? Because in this Buddhaland the three evil paths do not exist.** The first vow of Amitabha is that his Buddhaland will not have the three evil paths. Fearing that we may give rise to skepticism, he explains that these birds are not born from their offense

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retribution. The Land of Ultimate Bliss has no animal realm. In fact, Amitabha's sixteenth vow states that in his Pure Land, one will not even hear the names of the three evil paths! Hence even the bird names are not evil names, but rather are good retributions that symbolize the Buddha's ultimate merit and virtue.

The three evil paths refer to:

1. Hells: coming from the Sanskrit terms naraka or niraya 那落迦 meaning torture instruments 苦器.
2. Hungry ghosts: They have many fears, long-term hunger and are greatly emaciated.
3. Animals: They are often raised by humans. Also, they can be called companion beings 傍生, companions in committing offenses and receiving retribution 造業 傍故、受報亦傍.

*Question:* Why are there no evil paths in the Western Bliss Pure Land?

*Answer:* This is due to Amitabha's vow power. Furthermore, the Pure Land residents' good karmas are very deep. They have permanently ended the other types of bodies. They all enjoy blessings that are like our heavenly blessings, all from good karmas created in the past. Their minds are free of the three poisons (greed: the primary cause for the hungry ghost realm, anger: the primary cause for the hells, and stupidity: the primary cause for the animal realm). Therefore, there is no more need for these three types of retributions.

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**Shariputra, even the names of the three evil paths are unknown in this Buddha's land;** the names of the three evil paths are not part of the normal vocabulary there **how much the less could they actually exist!** Those three realms simply do not exist.

**Wishing to proclaim the Dharma's sound far and wide, Amitabha Buddha created this multitude of birds by transformation.** In the Saha world, the five skandhas belong to karmic retributions. In the Pure Land of the west, the five skandhas belong to the good retributions. Therefore, birds in the Pure Land are good names and not evil names.

To further elaborate on the causes for being reborn on the three evil paths:

1. The causes for rebirth in the hells are anger, the Five Rebellious Offenses, and the Ten Evils.
2. The causes for rebirth in the hungry ghost realm are greed, stinginess, and jealousy.
3. The causes for rebirth as an animal are stupidity and darkness.

The three evil paths are most dangerous because it is easier to fall into them than to get out. The fallen ones undergo countless kalpas of suffering with little hope of escape.

There is a hungry ghost anecdote in which two hungry ghosts were seeking for food together but found none. They decided to separate at the city gate and agreed to meet at the gate as soon as they could find food. One hungry ghost entered the gate while the other stayed outside. The outside ghost looked everywhere but found no food and waited for its buddy at the

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gate. The inside ghost found two drops of rectal pus. It greedily ate them and was extremely happy. It returned to the gate and asked the outside ghost, “How long did you have to wait?” The outside ghost said that it saw the city go through three destructions, and three rebuildings. It had to wait for many many years. And it was so hungry that its seven orifices bled but it could not die!

The birds in the Pure Land also represent the four kinds of complete giving, or Siddhantas 四悉檀:

1. Mundane Complete Giving (世間悉檀 using common means to help living beings obtain bliss and benefit): Because living beings enjoy birds, Amitabha created them to make us happy.
2. Curative Complete Giving (對治悉檀 targeting specific problems): The birds can speak Dharma, and therefore cannot be looked down upon. Residents will not in general give rise to lowly thoughts that can bring on such retributions as falling to the animal realm, and thus obtain the benefit of eradicating evil.
3. Universal Complete Giving (為人悉檀 for the sake of all living beings): This extraordinary environment will make listeners become mindful of the Triple Jewel and give rise to goodness in their hearts.
4. Primary Meaning Complete Giving (第一義悉檀 sharing the ultimate truth with all living beings): They obtain the benefit of entering the principles. They become one with Amitabha.

*Sutra Text:*



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**Shariputra, in that Buddhaland when the gentle winds blow, the rows of jeweled trees and jeweled nets reverberate with fine and wondrous sounds, as a symphony of one hundred thousand kinds of music played in harmony. All who hear these sounds are naturally mindful of the Buddha, mindful of the Dharma, and mindful of the Sangha. Shariputra, the Land of Utmost Bliss is adorned with splendor and virtues such as these.**

*Sutra Commentary:*

**Shariputra, in that Buddhaland when the gentle winds blow, the rows of jeweled trees and jeweled nets reverberate with fine and wondrous sounds, as a symphony of one hundred thousand kinds of music played in harmony.**

**Gentle Wind** is a touch dust. It is subtle and not violent. It comes from Amitabha's vow power. This wind can accomplish a myriad of things. In our world, the wind of impermanence and dementia can destroy the world, arising from living beings' afflictions. In the Pure Land, however, the wind is a superior retribution from the mind which is pure and honest, simple, kind and good. This wind is not noisy and the rain does not break up the soil. In the Pure Land, both wind and rain are timely and appropriate.

**Jeweled trees and jeweled nets:** These are form, smell and taste dusts. They are made from gems and yet are not rigid. They make music that clearly enunciates the Dharma such as precepts, samadhi, wisdom, etc...

## Explained by Master YongHua

**Fine and wondrous sounds:** This refers to sound dusts.

All of the above leave an impression in the form of mind dust. They are all dependent retribution dharmas, in contrast to all living beings who are proper retribution dharmas. I.e., they are all simply the substance of Amitabha's three bodies (Dharma, Reward and Transformation Bodies) and four virtues (Permanence, Bliss, Purity and (True) Self).

**All who hear these sounds are naturally mindful of the Buddha, mindful of the Dharma, and mindful of the Sangha.** Both non-sentient and sentient beings speak Dharma and make us mindful of the Triple Jewel. How can the non-sentient beings speak Dharma? All the 10,000 dharmas speak Dharma. You just don't know how to listen yet.

Such are the rewards of living in Amitabha's Pure Land. The trees and jeweled nets make delightful music that, instead of distracting you, increases your mindfulness.

Living beings are so happy that, on the outside, they become more mindful of the Triple Jewel, and on the inside, they awaken to their identity with the Triple Jewel. Realizing we are all one and the same, they bring forth the Bodhi mind!

The residents of the Pure Land are mindful of the Buddha in three ways:

1. Mind: They tie up the mind by reciting the Buddha's name 心中繫念.

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2. Light sound: They hear his name with their own ears 自耳聞.
3. Regular sound: They recite aloud, thereby creating the sound 高聲念.

Mindfulness of the Buddha has ten virtues:

1. It can expel sleepiness 能排睡眠.
2. The heavenly demons are frightened 天魔驚怖.
3. The sound reaches the ten directions 聲遍十方.
4. It can extinguish suffering in the three evil paths 三塗息苦.
5. External sounds cannot enter 外聲不入.
6. The mind is not scattered 心不散亂.
7. One becomes valiant and vigorous 勇猛精進.
8. All the Buddhas rejoice 諸佛歡喜.
9. Samadhi manifests 三昧現前.
10. One can obtain rebirth 往生淨土.

In addition, reciting the Buddha's name has four cases:

1. The mind recites but not the mouth 心念口不念.
2. The mouth recites but not the mind 口念心不念.
3. Both the mind and mouth recite 心口俱念.
4. Neither the mind nor mouth recites 心口俱不念.

One can enter samadhi through 1 and 3. The Auspicious Manifestation Sutra 瑞相經 states that the clear breeze,

## Explained by Master YongHua

which is neither hot nor cold, gently blows the jeweled nets and the multitudes of jeweled trees which speak forth unsurpassed wonderful Dharma sounds. Those who listen will not give rise to dusts and are naturally blissful and happy as if obtaining samadhi.

**Shariputra, the Land of Utmost Bliss is adorned with splendor and virtues such as these.** The repetition of this sentence causes us to deepen our faith. The wonderful adornments referred to here are the result of Amitabha's great vows and pure practices. Amitabha Buddha's mind and living beings' minds are mutually interconnected. The mind manifests into that land and vice versa, all the Pure Land is the manifestation of the mind (everything is made from the mind). The Pure Land is NOT separate from the Pure Mind.

When the Three Truths, Emptiness, Mundane and Middle Way Truths are penetrated and the Three Wisdoms, All Wisdom, Wisdom of the Way, and Wisdom of All Modes are interfused, at that time there will be a great awakening and perfect understanding. Then, in thought after thought, one will enter the Buddha's wisdom 薩婆若海, and effortlessly cultivating the Way with each step. This is called nature true cultivation 性真修, in which one cultivates and everyone also cultivates 一修一切修. From it, one can recognize one's own original mind, see one's own nature, and realize that Amitabha Buddha is not obtained from others. One is one and the same as Amitabha Buddha. That is why the sutra says that his Buddhaland accomplishes the two cultivations of creating conditions to assist living beings and realizing the

## Small Amitabha Sutra

Truth. The merit and virtue from such cultivation adorns that land.

*Sutra Text:*

**Shariputra, what do you think? Why is this Buddha called Amitabha? Shariputra, the brilliance of that Buddha's light is measureless, illumining the lands of the ten directions everywhere without obstruction. For this reason he is called Amitabha.**

*Sutra Commentary:*

**Shariputra, what do you think? Why is this Buddha called Amitabha? Shariputra, the brilliance of that Buddha's light is measureless, illumining the lands of the ten directions everywhere without obstruction. For this reason he is called Amitabha.** The earlier sections describe the superior dependent and proper retributions. In this section, we learn more about the wonderful proper retribution. The proper retribution here refers to both the host and companions.

*Question:* Do the residents of the Utmost Bliss Pure Land have share section or change section birth and death?

*Answer:* It depends on the types of Pure Lands that they are born into. If they are born into the Actual Reward Pure Land, then the residents belong to the change section body. If they are born into the Transformation Pure Land, then they belong to share section.

## Explained by Master YongHua

Why do we recite the Buddha's name? Because it represents Amitabha's limitless wisdom. 'Amita' translates as limitless. Shakyamuni uses the Buddha's name to capture limitless space ("light" spans the ten directions) and time ("lifespan" spans the three periods of time). Light represents stillness that is nonetheless constantly illuminating, constantly according with conditions. Life span illuminates but is constantly still, it accords with conditions but constantly remains unchanging. In light there is stillness, in stillness there is light. Space and time are interconnected just as the one true Dharma Realm's entire substance is.

Therefore, Amitabha is simply living beings' inherent enlightened principle nature 本覺理性. The mind that can recite the Buddha's name is initial enlightenment 始覺. That which is recited, the Buddha's name, is inherent enlightenment 本覺. Initial enlightenment is not separate from inherent enlightenment and vice versa. Initial and inherent enlightenment are not dual; living beings and Buddha are not dual.

The light of a Buddha's Response Body can shine near or far (ranging from one yojana, or ten or a hundred or a thousand yojanas, or one world, or ten, or a hundred, or a thousand worlds), depending on the Buddha's virtues. Amitabha's Response Body light universally shines (everywhere). This is a natural light unlike the light that the Buddha sends out, say when he speaks Dharma. Amitabha's light shines in all worlds without obstruction because he has deep conditions with living beings everywhere!

## Small Amitabha Sutra

Light consists of two kinds:

- 1) Inner light 內光: wisdom illuminates the principles 智內照理.
- 2) Outer light 外光: referring to the body's light which is discussed here in the sutra. Amitabha's body is of the Vajra substance, unobstructed and pure. It can manifest in all of the Dharma Realms. The Long Life Sutra states that his body has limitless light. When living beings encounter this light, the three defilements are eradicated. If those in the three evil paths encounter his light, their sufferings come to a sudden stop and at the end of life they will obtain liberation.

*Question:* Then why can some see his light while others cannot? And further, if his light shines on us regardless, why bother reciting his name?

*Answer:* Some can see his light because their gongfu is mature, or their prior life's obstructions are shallower. Just because one is blind does not mean that the sun does not shine. Just recite his name ten times without confusion and you'll definitely see Amitabha, let alone his light!

*Sutra Text:*

**Moreover, Shariputra, the lifespan of that Buddha and that of his people extends for measureless, limitless asamkhyeyas of kalpas. For this reason he is called Amitayus. And, Shariputra, since Amitabha became a Buddha, ten kalpas have passed.**

## Explained by Master YongHua

*Sutra Commentary:*

**Moreover, Shariputra, the lifespan of that Buddha and that of his people extends for measureless, limitless asamkhyeyas of kalpas. For this reason he is called Amitayus.**

The Dharma Body has no beginning and no end. It has no shape, and no mark. The Reward Body's lifespan has a beginning but no end and is the result of cultivation. The Transformation Body's lifespan accords with the Buddha's original vow and living beings' conditions. It can be short or long, and manifests as a result of cultivation.

Amitabha's vows #13 and #15 state that his lifespan will be limitless. The inhabitants of the Western Bliss Pure Land will also have the same limitless lifespan.

The mind nature illuminates yet is permanent and still. This is what sustains the limitless lifespan in the Pure Land. The substance of the mind nature that has been realized is measureless. Therefore this Buddha's lifespan is also measureless. Dharma Treasury Bhikshu's vows are infinite and therefore his fruition is also infinite.

**Asamkhyeyas** means "limitless number."

Amitabha became a Buddha ten kalpas ago. Therefore, all of his vows must also have already come true. Currently, he is still speaking Dharma. So, hurry up, get reborn to his Pure Land and listen.

Amitabha's lifespan is limitless but eventually it will come to an end and his Orthodox Dharma will become extinct at the



## Small Amitabha Sutra

upper half of the night. After that, GuanYin will then assume Buddhahood with the title Universal Light Merit and Virtues Mountain King 普光功德山王如來 Thus Come One.

His Proper Dharma Age will also be limitless. Then Great Strength Bodhisattva will take over with the title of Good Dwelling Merit and Virtues Jewel King 善住功德寶王如來 Thus Come One.

All living beings in that land can obtain the position of Equal Enlightenment in one lifetime.

We can cite eight anecdotes that illustrate Amitabha Buddha's past vows and practices on the causal grounds:

1. In the past, in front of World Self-Mastery King Buddha 世自在王佛, there was a king who listened to the Dharma and decided to leave the home-life. That was Dharma Treasury 法藏 Bhikshu. He made 48 vows. His vows and practices were perfected and thus he became a Buddha.
2. The Dharma Flower Sutra mentions that, at the time of Great Penetrating Wisdom Victory Thus Come One 大通智勝如來, there were sixteen princes who left the home-life. They practiced pure conduct, vigorously seeking to obtain Unsurpassed Bodhi. After that, Buddha entered Stillness, they constantly enjoyed receiving and reciting the Dharma Flower Sutra. After-

## Explained by Master YongHua

wards, they all attained Buddhahood. Amitabha was the ninth prince.

This example shows that accepting and maintaining the Lotus Sutra is also a Pure Land Dharma Door.

3. The Compassion Flower Sutra 悲華經 relates that, limitless kalpas in the past, there was a Wheel Turning Sage King called Non-fighting Mindfulness 無諍念. He made offerings to Jewel Store Thus Come One 寶藏如來. At that time, the King made a vow that when he accomplished Buddhahood, his country would have all sorts of purities and adornments. That Buddha then gave him a prediction that after kalpas as numerous as the Ganges' sands, he would become a Buddha. His country will be called Safe and Blissful 安樂, another name for the Land of Utmost Bliss.
4. The Equal Uniting Maintaining Sutra 大乘方廣總持經 states that at the time of No Defilements Flaming Title Rising King Thus Come One 無垢焰稱起王如來, lived the Pure Life 淨命 Bhikshu who united and maintained all sutras, as many as fourteen hundred million divisions. In accord with living beings' desire, he widely spoke Dharma. That was a previous incarnation of Amitabha.

## Small Amitabha Sutra

Many left-home people mistakenly assume that the Pure Land Dharma Door only involves reciting the Buddha's name, reciting the Small Amitabha Buddha Sutra and the 48 great vows (extracted from the Infinite Life Sutra). However, they should follow Amitabha Buddha's example and also consider researching other doctrines and widely expounding them as well.

5. The Worthy Kalpa Sutra 賢劫經 states that, at the time of Cloud Thunder Growl Thus Come One 辯嚴淨雷音吼如來, there was a prince called Pure Blessings Reward Multitude of Sounds 淨福報眾音, who made offerings to that Buddha. He brought forth the Bodhi mind, seeking wisdom from above and transforming living beings below. He now is Amitabha Buddha.
6. The Worthy Kalpa Sutra 賢劫經 states that, at the time of Gold Dragon Decisive Light Buddha 金龍決光佛, there was a Dharma Master called No Limit Jewel Sound Practices 無限量寶音行 who gave his all to propagate the Dharma. He now is Amitayus. In other words, helping propagate the Buddhadharma also creates a lot of rebirth blessings.
7. The Contemplating the Buddha Samadhi Ninth Sutra 觀佛三昧海經 says that at the time of Emptiness

## Explained by Master YongHua

King Buddha 空王佛, there were four bhikshus who were full of afflictions. A voice in space instructed them to contemplate the Buddha. They thus obtained the Buddha Mindfulness Samadhi. Amitabha was the third of these bhikshus.

“Full of afflictions” means that they were burned by the fire of sexual desire. In such situations, just follow the lead of the above-mentioned monks and recite the Buddha’s name and you will get great benefits.

8. Like an illusion Samantha and Limitless Seals Dharma Doors Sutra 如幻三摩地無量印法門經 tells us that, at the time of The Lion Roaming Golden Light 獅子遊戲金光如來 Thus Come One, there was a king named Victorious Awesome Venerated Esteemed 勝威尊重. He made offerings to that Buddha and practiced Chan. That king now has become Amitabha Buddha.

This is just a short list of Amitabha’s past vows and practices on the causal ground.

**And, Shariputra, since Amitabha became a Buddha, ten kalpas have passed.** The Dharma Body requires no attaining and from this standpoint therefore there is no need to mention ten kalpas. However, both the Reward and Transformation bodies require realization and therefore can be discussed in terms of kalpas.

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One small kalpa is one increase and one decrease. An increase is the time it takes for the average lifespan to grow from ten years to 84,000 years, given that the average lifespan increases by one year every hundred years. A decrease is the time it takes for the average lifespan to reduce from 84,000 years back down to ten years, again changing at the rate of one year every hundred years. A middle kalpa is twenty small kalpas. Four middle kalpas is one great kalpa.

Amitabha has been speaking Dharma since he originally accomplished Bodhi ten great kalpas ago. He vowed and accomplished a limitless lifespan in response to the fact it's extremely difficult for living beings to encounter a Buddha. This shows his compassion.

*Sutra Text:*

**Moreover, Shariputra, that Buddha has measureless, limitless asamkhyeyas of Sound Hearer disciples, their number incalculable. So too is the assembly of Bodhisattvas.**

**Shariputra, that Buddhaland is adorned with splendor and virtues such as these.**

*Sutra Commentary:*

**Moreover, Shariputra, that Buddha has measureless, limitless asamkhyeyas of Sound Hearer disciples, their number incalculable. So too is the assembly of Bodhisattvas.** Amongst the inhabitants are countless Arhats and Bodhisattvas. In the Pure Land, we will be surrounded by countless

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Good Knowing Advisers! They are all disciples of Amitabha Buddha who were born after him and obtained the fruition under his guidance.

Vow 14: “Provided I become a Buddha, if anyone spends one hundred thousand kalpas to count the Arhats in my land who become Pratyekabuddhas, and can know their number, then I will not attain enlightenment. 法藏第十四願云：設我得佛，國中聲聞，三千大千世界悉成緣覺，於百千劫悉共計校，知其數者，不取正覺。今果成，聲聞無量，故不能知。” This is because the number of Arhats in his country is **incalculable**.

These Arhats all have the mind for Bodhi. Otherwise they would not have the capacity to be reborn into this Buddhaland. For example, Hinayana practitioners who make the Bodhi vow at the end of their lives can then be reborn there. Amitabha Buddha will then speak Dharma appropriate to their potential. Listening to the Dharma can help them sever view and thought delusions and thus attain the Arhat fruition.

今現在說法。由此信願往生。定非藏通二教之機。故斷定總屬別圓二教所攝菩薩機矣。

The Pure Land is also a training ground for Bodhisattvas of all levels. These Bodhisattvas are as countless as the Arhats.

*Question:* The Two Vehicles practitioners cannot get reborn to the Actual Reward Pure Land. Rather, the four fruition Arhats can be reborn in the Transformation Pure Land. Why

## Small Amitabha Sutra

then does the sutra mention only the fourth stage and not the remaining three fruitions?

*Answer:* The Infinite Life Sutra says Arhats do not obtain rebirth to the Pure Land. This is from the perspective of the Actual Reward Pure Land. The sutra only mentions the fourth fruition for the sake of simplicity: if we can make it to the fourth stage in the Pure Land, the other three fruitions are much easier to attain.

The Large Amitabha Sutra praises the merit and virtues of these Bodhisattvas:

1. Their wisdom is as deep and vast as the great ocean. Unlike ordinary people who cultivate in order to benefit themselves, Bodhisattvas cultivate to unfold their wisdom.
2. Their samadhi is unmoving like Mount Sumeru. The foundation of their practice is samadhi power. Therefore, the main branch of Orthodox Buddhism emphasizes the practice and development of samadhi power.
3. Their wisdom light is bright and pure, surpassing that of the sun. With wisdom one is naturally able to clearly illuminate everything so that nothing is left in the dark. Everything is out in the open and one is proper and upright.
4. Bodhisattvas' Pure Dharma is perfect and complete like Snow Mountain. Purity here refers to the absence of desire, in particular, sexual desire. Why do we think non-stop? It's from excessive desires.

## Explained by Master YongHua

5. Bodhisattvas are level and equal like the ground. They cross over both evil and good beings. They have put a stop to the mad and discriminating mind and have transcended duality. We still suffer because we still want more: a bigger house, a nicer car, a prettier trophy wife, etc. The discriminating mind feeds our greedy mind.
6. Bodhisattvas are pure like water that can wash away all defilements. Defilements are not tolerated and hence washed away.
7. Bodhisattvas are like the Fire King who can burn all affliction fuel. Why is the difference between #6 and #7? Water can be used to wash external stuff, whereas fire must be used to burn up the impurities inside, just like we need to use high temperatures to smelt and purify gold.

At the practice level, what are water and fire? Fire is to use Chan or cross our legs to generate heat. Water is the great assembly: you and me.

8. Bodhisattvas are like the wind which comes to the world and universally reaches everywhere without any obstructions. The wind is formless and does not truly manifest until it encounters resistance. Then it reveals itself as an unrelenting force of nature. For example, worlds are sustained by the Wind Wheel.
9. Bodhisattvas are like empty space, not attached to anything. They are free and at ease. They can adapt and adjust to all environments.



## Small Amitabha Sutra

10. Bodhisattvas are as pure as the lotus and are free from all defilements. Lotuses occupy a special place in Buddhism, denoting purity. This is because they arise from mud and are not stained by it. Beauty emanates from goodness and lack of defilements.

The Buddhist practice is that of purity. Once purified, we then need to jump back into the mud to perfect our own purification.

11. Bodhisattvas are like a big vehicle. They can vastly transport living beings. They are humongous vessels that can ferry living beings across the sea of suffering to the shore of safety and bliss.

Notice “big” is used in contrast to small. Vehicle denotes the ability to transport. Therefore, Small Vehicle refers to the ability to transport the small self while Big Vehicle can transport the big self. What is the small self? It is the ego. How about the big self? It is the combined selves of all sentient as well as insentient beings. It is simply the Dharma Body.

Furthermore, the metaphor of a vehicle refers to a truly inconceivable dharma of the Bodhisattvas. It symbolizes the ability to ferry beings to safety. You see, sentient beings are very hard to teach. They simply do not listen to reason. Therefore, Bodhisattvas must resort to transporting living beings to safety in order to rescue them.

## Explained by Master YongHua

Guess what is the big Dharma for transporting living beings? It's the Pure Land.

12. Bodhisattvas are like quaking Dharma Thunder. They shake and awaken the unawakened. Their Dharma can shock and awe living beings, causing them to wake up from their stupor and dreams.

Sometimes, it is necessary to be heavy handed because living beings simply refuse to change unless fear is instilled in them.

13. Bodhisattvas are like sweet dew which rains down to nourish and benefit living beings. Sweet dew soothes and nourishes all living beings, extending their lifespans. Rain implies enabling each individual to absorb what they can. It also implies generosity. Bodhisattvas give more than we think we need.

14. Bodhisattvas are like the Vajra Mountain, hence the demons and externalists cannot move them. Vajra is the hardest substance in the universe, available only to the Mahayana practitioner. Why is it indestructible? Because it cannot be conceived of by your mind. If you could conceive of it, then you could also come up with a way to destroy it.

The Bodhisattvas' appearance in the world is likened to erecting a Vajra mountain to defeat and subdue the demons and externalists.

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15. Bodhisattvas are like the Brahma Heaven King because they are the best of all goodness. What is goodness? In Buddhism, it is defined as not doing evil. Evil is to violate the precepts. The Buddha described these rules of morality in great detail to help us understand clearly the difference between good and evil. When the Buddhadharma is not available in the world through the precept Dharma, then goodness is to refrain from committing the ten evils, four of which are committed with the mouth: lying, cursing, frivolous speech and speaking with a double-tongue, three with the body: killing, stealing and sexual misconduct, and three with the mind: greed, hatred and stupidity.

The Brahma Heaven King has a jeweled net which is extremely adorned. Likewise, the Bodhisattvas adorn Mahayana and each other's practice and virtue without any rivalry.

*Question:* It seems that the Buddha dwells too much on doom and gloom. Are we that bad? Why did he not teach about goodness? For example, can't we try to do good and accept the fact that occasionally we slip up because we're not perfect?

*Answer:* Good question! It makes sense because it's coming from the perspective of people with ideals who believe in helping others but realize that they sometimes do make mistakes. It's very commendable if you can be like this. The world would be better off if more people acted and thought in this way.

## Explained by Master YongHua

However, I feel that the Buddha's approach will produce bigger and better goodness. Why? If you concentrate on goodness and allow for minor mistakes, you inevitably make excuses for yourself. Whereas if you were to concentrate on purifying yourself from all evil, it would be much more virtuous because it is much harder to resist temptations.

However, before you get too discouraged, let me share with you a well-known Buddhist secret: we all have the same Buddha nature. For you non-Buddhists, this means that we are intrinsically good, very good, extremely good. The proof is that all of us are capable of compassion, kindness, courage, selflessness, generosity, caring, etc... Buddhas are the best that one can be. We, however, are simply not completely good yet because we still have imperfections. But if we can eliminate these imperfections, then we will become Buddhas and our original goodness will naturally manifest. That is why focusing on eliminating the imperfections is more effective and will ultimately produce the most good. Buddhism is not only about gloom and doom as one might think.

16. Bodhisattvas are like the Great Tree King because they can universally shade all beings and provide shelter from the rain. Drawing near them can provide relief against the burning heat of anger and hatred as well as the rain of desires. Bodhisattvas are the best source for all living beings to find rest and shelter.

In that case, where can they be found?

## Small Amitabha Sutra

Obviously, they can be found where Mahayana is practiced.

Someone raises her hand and adds that Bodhisattvas put up a lot of walls so that they are not easily spotted. That is right, they help discreetly and wish that it not be known. Therefore, they cannot be found where there are spectacles. They will not proclaim that they are living Buddhas or incarnations. Nor do they demonstrate special skills or spiritual powers. Doing so would only appeal to our sense of greed or jealousy.

We do not have enough time to discuss this exhaustively, therefore we will conclude by saying that drawing near them will lessen our afflictions.

Someone else raises her hand and says that she believes that Bodhisattvas are within our hearts.

Let me relate a Dharma to you.

When I was practicing as a novice monk under Great Master Xuan Hua, we were very well taken care of and protected within his monasteries. But when we had to venture outside, then we were more exposed to temptations and more likely to break precepts. One senior monk taught me this Dharma. Our teacher said that every time we went outside and were exposed, we could recite Master Xuan Hua's name and would not break precepts. It really worked!

## Explained by Master YongHua

That illustrates the point that was recently made: Bodhisattvas are within our heart. Have faith and they will protect and aid us.

17. Bodhisattvas are like Mandarava Flowers. This flower is very rare and very difficult to encounter. It blossoms once in a blue moon and only lasts for a few hours. Similarly, Bodhisattvas only give us a brief moment to recognize them and it takes great causes and conditions to be able to encounter them.

These flowers symbolize their beautiful conduct. Because they are pure goodness, Buddhas and Bodhisattvas are so magnetic and can be very handsome.

18. Bodhisattvas are like the Great Peng Bird 金翅鳥, which can inspire awe and subdue the externalists. This bird possesses inconceivable spiritual powers and even terrorizes dragons who also have tremendous spiritual powers. The externalists are quite proud of their spiritual powers but they are no match for the Bodhisattvas.

19. Bodhisattvas are like the multitude of traveling birds. They do not store or save anything. They have the least attachments and dependencies.

Revisiting the story that we mentioned at the beginning of this book of a monk who was so poor that he did not even have a ladle, I'll give you my Hollywood version of what transpired.

## Small Amitabha Sutra

A monk was practicing Chan at a monastery. Every day, when he was thirsty he would pick up a ladle and walk down to the river to take a drink of water.

Realize how incredible his state was. Though he was still attached to his ladle, he could let go of everything else. Common mortals like us would not be able to make it without our friends, car, house etc! We are certainly a lot more confused than this monk.

*Question:* Does the ladle carry any kind of metaphorical meaning?

*Answer:* Your question reveals your academic propensities. No it does not. This monk was able to let go of all his habit energies except for his dependency on the ladle for drinking.

So, one day, as he went down to the river to take a drink from the ladle, he suddenly awakened to his attachment to the ladle. He immediately dropped it in the river. That's right, he did not even consider bringing it back to the monastery in case he might need it in the future, as rational people like us would do.

He walked back to the monastery and, lo and behold, his teacher was waiting for him at the gate and asked, "What are your views?" That's Chan parlance for, "Tell me what you know." Or in layman's terms, "What have you done to deserve my continued support of your practice?" The monk therefore replied, "Last year, I was so poor that I only had a ladle. But this year, I am so much poorer

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because I don't even have a ladle." That is why his teacher said, "Good indeed! Good indeed!"—meaning, "You've understood and I also understand." That's Chan language for, "You've made it. I certify that you're enlightened." If you were enlightened then you would get the drift from just four words.

Relinquish your attachments and then you can be as free as a bird.

20. Bodhisattvas are like the cattle king which cannot be defeated. The cattle kings are strong and unyielding by nature. Why are Bodhisattvas invincible? Perhaps it is because they have no flaws. Or maybe it is simply because nothing can possibly damage them. In the event that they are flawed, then they are proficient at destroying the opposition before they can be defeated. Or if they cannot defeat their opponents themselves, then they can obtain help that is invincible. What kind of help can render them invincible? Ultimately, they are backed up by their teachers, by the Buddhas of the ten directions who are constantly mindful of them. The good news is that if we belong to the good side and place our faith in the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas, then we as well cannot be defeated.
21. Bodhisattvas are like the great elephant king, in that they are well adjusted and subdued. They possess great powers and yet manage to keep them in check. Their afflictions, if there are any left, are kept in check. Just like elephants are kept in check with barbs, Bodhisattvas religiously observe the precept barbs to regulate themselves.



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22. Bodhisattvas are like the lion king which is fearless. Their bravery comes from the awareness of their incomparable strength and skills. At the causal level, fearlessness is the result of practicing the giving of fearlessness.
23. Bodhisattvas are spacious like empty space. They possess great compassion and equanimity. Like empty space, they can embrace everything.

Empty space is boundless. Our body may be bounded but our mind can become boundless. How? By practicing great compassion and equanimity.

Compassion is being unable to stand seeing others suffer and thereby doing something about it to provide relief. It takes doing and not talking to be compassionate. Great compassion is to be of the same substance. What does that mean? That is to realize that we all are interconnected, sharing the same Buddha nature, which is our substance.

Starting out, we are all capable of compassion. But we tend to discriminate friends versus foes, family versus strangers. That is why we need to practice equanimity in order to progress toward great compassion. It does take quite a while.

*Question:* What if my resources are limited, how can I possibly practice great compassion?

*Answer:* I can understand where you are coming from. Of course, you can normally live to a maximum age of 100,

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thus you are limited by time. Furthermore, you only have so many assets, thereby limiting the number of people whom you could help.

In particular, you are limited by this worst factor. Does any of you know what her biggest limitation is? *<No one knew the answer>* It's her impatience.

Not only is she impatient, so are all of you. It is the sickness of modern times. Everyone is so focused on results. Her question really means, "How do I succeed in being greatly compassionate, which is an infinite state, when I am finite?"

Instead can you not focus on making your best effort to rescue others and not demand guaranteed success without which you will not even bother?

This is just to name a few of the characteristics of Bodhisattvas. It would take endless kalpas to speak of them all.

**Shariputra, that Buddhaland is adorned with splendor and virtues such as these:** This is not the same as the sentence before because this refers to the Proper retribution. The previous sentence was referring to the dependent retribution.

The Large Sutra states that Amitabha made the vow, "When I attain Bodhi, my light will illuminate countless worlds. All dark and obscure places will be brightened. All the gods, humans, as well as venomous animals and insects who perceive my light, will become compassionate, do good, and will be reborn into my country." Also, his great vow number thir-

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teen indicates that his lifespan will exceed ten thousand hundred millions of nayutas of kalpas. In fact, he vowed that if his lifespan were limited, he would not become a Buddha.

The Large Sutra also has an analogy: “Suppose that bhikshus numbering in the ten thousand hundred millions of nayutas and possessing the same spiritual powers as Mahamaudgalyayana were to count Amitabha Buddha’s initial assembly of Sound Hearers—they could at best come up to less than one hundredth.”

Furthermore, Amitabha Buddha also vowed that when he becomes a Buddha, the Bodhisattvas residing in his country will have spiritual penetrations, wisdom, eloquence, hallmarks and subtle characteristics as well as an awesome spirit that are the same as his.

### ***Emphasizing Pureland's superior advantages encouraging one to make the vow***

*Sutra Text:*

**Moreover, Shariputra, the living beings born in the Land of Utmost Bliss are all avaivartika. Among them are many who in this very life will dwell in Buddhahood. Their number is extremely many; it is incalculable. And only in measureless, limitless asamkhyeyas of kalpas could they be counted.**

## Explained by Master YongHua

### *Sutra Commentary:*

In our Saha world, there are just too many conditions for retreating. The Thus Come One is very compassionate. That is why he appeared in the world and brought the precept Dharma to help prevent living beings from regressing and falling into the lower realms. For example, observing the deviant sex precept will prevent falling into the animal realm by avoiding creating causes and conditions for this realm. In contrast, once born by transformation into the Pure Land, there are no such conditions for regression. There are no women and hence there is no problem of sexual desire in the Pure Land. In fact, the conditions there are even more favorable for one to make progress consistently and practice the Bodhisattva path.

One of my disciples has a close friend who is a hot-shot dentist. This gentleman is absolutely non-religious and is actually quite full of himself. When he passed away, my disciple came and requested the 49-day Dharma to assist his friend in obtaining rebirth to the Western Pure Land. So we did our part to give him the option to go to the Western Bliss Pure Land. And he did choose to go there. Afterwards, he came back to visit his daughter. She dreamt of him two nights in a row. That's how attached he was to her. He said that he was quite comfortable but complained to her that since he went there he had nothing to do but cultivate!

**Moreover, Shariputra, the living beings born in the Land of Utmost Bliss are all avaivartika. Among them are many who in this very life will dwell in Buddhahood.**

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**All** means that all grades of birth, without distinction, are **avaivartika**.

**Avaivartika**: means “not retreating or turning away.” The residents of the Pure Land obtain all four kinds of Avaivartika:

1. Non-retreating in position: They will not regress to the rank of ordinary people because they have entered the flow of the sages. This means that they have reached at least First Stage Arhatship.
2. Non-retreating in conduct: To always cross over living beings, they will not fall back to the Two Vehicles who do not care to wade into the mundane to benefit living beings. This means that they have reached the Three Worthies.
3. Non-retreating in thought: To flow into the Bodhisattva Realm in thought after thought, their minds are set on the Middle Way. They lean neither towards emptiness nor existence. This means that they are enlightened.
4. Non-retreating in the quest for Bodhi. They cannot help but become a Buddha.

此文進退雙明。教道不亂。教中位次分明。絲毫不容紊亂。若是具足煩惱之凡夫。自然不是初果。見道位之聖人。若是但求自利之二乘。自然不是自他兩利。常恆度生之菩薩。若是異生性之三賢。未破無明。未證法身。不與如來體同。名異生性。自然不是破無明證法身。同

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生性之菩薩等。此是下位。未可躡等上位。未得調得。未證調證。成大妄語不可。

念不退菩薩。已得同生性。非復異生性。行不退菩薩。已發大心。非僅見道之小果。位不退聖人。非是具足煩惱之人民。此是上位。未可仍稱下名。既已進步。而獲新證。則捨故稱。如登初地。則捨三賢之故名等。

Since they do not retreat in their quest for Bodhi, they are no longer like us ordinary people, who have not attained any fruition yet. The Two Vehicles do not practice the Bodhisattva path but are above ordinary people in attainment. Nonetheless, those of the Two Vehicles can attain 'other birth', which refers to births that are not the same in nature as those of ordinary beings 則非同生性等; however, those of the Two Vehicles have not yet certified to the Dharma Body. Then:

1. Thought non-retreating: To have no other birth again 非復異生.
2. Practice non-retreating: To only see the Way 非僅見道.
3. Position non-retreating: They are not ordinary people 非是人民.

*Question:* Once we are reborn into the Pure Land, what is the big deal about non-retreating?

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*Answer:* There are many conditions for non-retreating, which provide great advantages:

1. You are not bound by illness and suffering 無病苦纏.
2. There is no inappropriate conduct 無違行.
3. You often recite sutras and Dharmas 常誦經法.
4. You often do good 常營善事.
5. You are often harmonious and in accord with the principles, and devoid of disobedience and fighting 長和順、無諸違諍事.

In our Saha land, the majority of people often retreat in cultivation. When led astray by desires and external states, most retreat and give in.

The Ten Doubts Shastra 十疑論, indicates that there are five causes and conditions that help the residents obtain non-retreating:

1. Amitabha's great compassionate vow power provides assistance. Dharma Treasury Bhikshu vowed that when he becomes a Buddha, those who hear of his name, take refuge, and vigorously practice will obtain the Three Patiences, described later, and will obtain non-retreating toward all Dharmas. It is like entering the vast ocean riding on a great vessel: one will not easily get drowned.
2. This Buddha's light constantly illuminates, making thoughts of Bodhi increase continually. His light gath-

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ers us in and increases our goodness, just as the light of the moon illuminates the darkness to help us avoid falling into pits.

3. The water, birds, trees, forests and wind are always speaking the Dharma, making those who listen become mindful of the Triple Jewel and therefore obtain non-retreating. This is like a confused person who hears the sound of the bell and subsequently has more proper thoughts.
4. The residents of the Pure Land have many Bodhisattvas as co-cultivators. Outside there are no demons or deviant companions. Inside, they have no afflictions. They therefore obtain non-retreating. The advantage of being in an environment where only superior and good people gather in cultivation cannot be emphasized enough!
5. Their lifespan is infinite kalpas, just like the Buddha's. That is plenty of time to make significant attainments, and certify to sagely positions. This is like traveling ten thousand miles and finally reaching the treasure mountain: one is never poor again. Furthermore, in our Saha land, we are subject to confusion each time we are born. In contrast, one is born by transformation into the Western Bliss Pure Land onto a lotus flower and therefore is free from delusions, thus avoiding regressing due to committing offenses. In one lifetime those in the Pure Land can all make it to Buddhahood without regressing anymore.

Regarding the Three Patiences, patience is to be able to recognize the phenomenon and noumenon allowing one's mind to be at peace and at ease. There are three kinds of patience:



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1. Sound Patience 音響忍: Meaning to listen to the teachings and obtain peace of mind. This belongs to the Tenth Faith position of one who obtains awakening through hearing the Dharma.
2. Accordance Patience 柔順忍: By according with the true principles, one relies on one's contemplative power to obtain enlightenment. This pertains to the three Worthies who can subdue their retribution confusions, preventing the natureless six dusts from being produced.
3. Non-production Dharma Patience 無生法忍: One's understanding tallies with the true principles. This points to the Seventh Ground Bodhisattva or above. They are apart from all marks and thus enlighten to the true marks.

According to the Flower Adornment Sutra, there are three kinds of patience:

1. Patience versus enmity and harm 耐怨害忍，謂人以怨憎毒害而加於我，即能安心忍耐而無返報之心，是名耐怨害忍。 We must endure being harmed, especially by those who can be so evil! The key here is to “peacefully” endure it. The second part that is not that easy to do is to refrain from retaliating, no matter how much one might feel like doing so.
2. Peacefully endure suffering 安受苦忍，謂疾病水火刀杖等眾苦所逼，即能安心忍受恬然

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不動，是名安受苦忍。 The first type of patience entails enduring external factors. If we can no longer take it, we have the option of walking away in order to refrain from committing offenses. For if we commit more offenses, we would only compound the past enmity and we would not resolve the situation at all! This second type of patience is to endure internal sufferings that might manifest as sicknesses, calamities, or events that cause internal afflictions. The nature of the test is “oppression”: we have no way of getting relief. The internal pressure builds up until we implode or explode. We simply cannot walk away from it!

3. Dharma patience 諦察法忍，謂審察諸法體性虛幻，本無生滅，信解真實心無妄動，安然忍可，是名諦察法忍。 This is obtained through understanding that all dharmas are false, that they arise from causes and conditions, lack a self-nature, and therefore we should not be attached to them.

Worldly people need to learn how to develop the first two types of patience. This can make or break an individual. Once you effectively handle the first two types of tests, then you are qualified to move on to the test of Dharma Patience.

This is why our left-home training program is so special: it helps build the foundation to work at this third type of test. Having the proper foundation is

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critical to successfully pass this third type of test. This is why we have a mix of serious cultivators and evil cultivators. The evil cultivators are tolerated so that they can help provide tests to the true cultivators.

*Question:* How do I practice the third type of patience?

*Answer:* Someone suggests that based on his twenty year research of the Dharma, we need to learn to not be attached to things. He further explains that we should not think too much about things. For example, we should be such that we may have money but should not be that attached to it.

I say, that is just a lot of talk. Let me give you an example. Let's say I bought a very expensive wristwatch. I enjoy it but claim that I am not attached to it because I really don't think about it. That does not really count because I still own it.

The true test is whether or not you are able to give it away. If you can, then you are on the way to truly being detached from it. Someone else sighs and says that he has at least 10,000 things that he has a hard time giving away. Keep giving away and eventually you will discover that which you really cannot give up. And once you figure out how to give up all the things that you cannot, then you will realize Dharma Patience.

Another shastra, The Treatise on the Awakening of Faith 起信論, states that those who are born to the Western Bliss

## Explained by Master YongHua

Pure Land often get to see the Buddha and thus eventually obtain non-retreating, whereas in the Saha world, the majority of cultivators are faced with retreating conditions. This is why there is a saying: The Way is one foot tall 道高一尺, but the demons are a yard tall 魔高一丈. Demons often come to harass us, causing us to give up or retreat.

Today, we have new guests to our lecture during this Buddha recitation week. They probably cannot help but wonder about why we normally start our lecture with a Dharma Request protocol.

This comes from Great Master Xuan Hua who brought Mahayana to the United States. Most temples do not have such a Dharma request protocol.

Actually, it dates all the way back to the time when Shakyamuni Buddha first became enlightened. He then contemplated our world and decided not to teach the humans because we just would not be able to understand.

At that point, the Brahma Heaven King knew. He immediately ordered Shakra to kneel behind him and both of them requested the Buddha to teach the Buddhadharma in order to benefit the Saha residents. They executed the Dharma request protocol and that was how the Buddha agreed to teach us the Buddhadharma. Regardless of how you might feel about the Brahma Heaven King and Shakra, we must be grateful to them for having requested the Dharma in order to enable us to end suffering and obtain bliss.

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*Question:* I thought that the Buddha has infinite wisdom. Why did he decide not to teach us and then change his mind?

*Answer:* He saw that ordinary beings cannot possibly grasp what he sees and understands. Why not? Because:

1. Our ego gets in the way. The Buddhadharma is designed to get rid of the ego, which is the source of all suffering. That is why it will reject the teachings if it ever feels threatened. By the way, that represents a real challenge in speaking Dharma because if I speak the truth then your ego will be offended. If I flatter your ego, saying how great you are in gracing our humble Way place with your presence and promise to teach you meditation to help you appreciate the sunset more, then you think that I am a good teacher. However that is the worldly dharma. The Buddhadharma is about speaking the truth which often offends your ego. That is why we sometimes have to compromise and not offend you too much, lest you never again set foot in our small temple.
2. What the Buddha sees and understands cannot be expressed with words or language.

He then changed his mind because he was sincerely requested by the God Kings to speak Dharma for us.

Since I patiently waited for someone to ask the obvious follow-up question but no one did, let me ask it myself then.

*Question:* If his wisdom cannot be expressed in words then what did he speak of? How do his teachings help us gain the same vision and understanding as that of the Buddha's?

## Explained by Master YongHua

*Answer:* The Buddhadharmas are a set of principles and instructions. The principles refer to the Universal Truth. In order to understand the principles, just follow the instructions that the Buddha, Bodhisattvas and patriarchs gave us. One may know and speak of the principles but one must execute the instructions in order to truly see what the words mean. Ultimately, Buddhism is about cultivation and execution: reciting the Buddha's name, mantras, sutras, doing Chan and the other myriad practices.

**Their number is extremely many; it is incalculable. And only in measureless, limitless asamkhyeyas of kalpas could they be counted.** In our Saha world, Shakyamuni Buddha already crossed over countless living beings. As he informed Maitreya in the Dharma Flower Assembly, the number of living beings who accomplished the multitude of fruitions from both the Hinayana and Mahayana Dharmas under him is countless. They all obtained non-regression. We will include the Chinese list for those who are curious: 釋迦牟尼在法華會上，對彌勒菩薩說，阿逸多、我說是如來壽命長遠，六百八十萬那由他恆河沙眾生，得無生法忍，復有千倍菩薩摩訶薩，得聞持陀羅尼門，乃至復有三千大千世界微塵數菩薩摩訶薩，能轉不退法輪，復有二千中千國土微塵數菩薩摩訶薩，能轉清淨法輪，復有小千國土微塵數菩薩摩訶薩，八生當得阿耨多羅三藐三菩提。復有四四天下微塵數菩薩摩訶薩，四生當

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得阿耨多羅三藐三菩提。復有三四天下微塵數菩薩摩訶薩，三生當得阿耨多羅三藐三菩提。復有二四天下微塵數菩薩摩訶薩，二生當得阿耨多羅三藐三菩提。復有一四天下微塵數菩薩摩訶薩，一生當得阿耨多羅三藐三菩提。如是釋迦在娑婆世界，度生尚如是多，何況淨土阿彌陀佛。 How many more are crossed over by Amitabha, given that his lifespan is infinitely longer!

Thanks to Amitabha's inconceivable powers, even living beings who committed the Five Evil Offenses or the Ten Evil Deeds can, under the right conditions, be reborn to the Pure Land. The Ten Evil Deeds were mentioned above. The Five Evil Offenses are: 1) shedding the Buddha's blood, 2) killing an arhat, 3) killing one's father, 4) killing one's mother, and 5) destroying the sangha's harmony. If those who have committed such offenses can sincerely recite Amitabha's name ten times at the time of death, then each thought can erase 80 hundred millions kalpas of birth and death offenses and they will be able to bring their own karma with them and be reborn 待業往生. They will see a gold lotus, as big as the sun, appearing in front of them and will be reborn in a single thought. Although they will stay in the Lower Lower Grade quarters, they can still certify to the three non-retreats. This happens only in the Western Bliss Pure Land!

There was a king who was skeptical about the ability to bring one's karma along to the Pure Land 待業往生. He

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expressed his doubt to a monk. The monk said, “A huge rock would sink to the bottom of the water, would it or not?” The king replied, “That’s for sure!” The monk continued, “What if it’s placed on a boat, would it still sink?” The king suddenly understood, responding, “Yes, if one relies on the power of Amitabha’s great vows, then one can easily escape the sea of suffering.”

The patriarchs also say that by reciting the Buddha’s name, one can carry off one’s old karmas to rebirth. However, one’s new karmas, created after one has learned of the Pure Land Dharma Door, cannot always be carried along. Pure Land practitioners should not on one hand recite Buddha’s name while creating offenses on the other. If they do, at death, obstructions will arise and prevent their rebirth to the Pure Land. Amitabha Buddha does not protect criminals. Besides, our rebirth grade is proportional to our recitation power.

Yong Ming Shou Chan Master 永明壽禪師, who is also a Pure Land patriarch, said, “No Chan but with Pure Land—10,000 cultivate, 10,000 obtain rebirth. Quickly make the vow and you will get there. If there is no cultivation there will be no rebirth to the Pure Land.”

*Question:* Why do Chan practitioners not recite the Buddha’s name?

*Answer:* Let me see if I understand what you really are asking about. Are you asking why are Chan practitioners so sure that they can accomplish perfection in their Chan practice this



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lifetime and therefore do not feel that they need to recite the Buddha's name to at least buy some insurance just in case?

It is what you mean to ask?

Ok, I cannot answer for those Chan practitioners that you refer to because I don't know them.

May I offer you my humble opinion?

In general, it is not the student's fault but rather it is the teacher's. As far as I am concerned, a teacher's job is to help the students obtain liberation as quickly as possible. He should teach his students the appropriate Dharma Door to match with their potential. For example, Chan should be taught to those with deep roots. In contrast, for people with shallow roots like us, it's better to recite the Buddha's name and hope for rebirth as soon as possible, because we are unlikely to be enlightened this time around. By the way, the converse also applies to Pure Land practitioners: those with superior roots should also be taught Chan instead of sticking solely with Pure Land.

Why is it so difficult to accomplish Chan? Let's elaborate a little bit on ending birth and death. It's not easy because we must be able to let go of everything that is precious to us: our money, car, house, jewelry, dog, children, wife etc... Whoever can do that, please raise your hand. *<Today no one raised their hand.>* If you have any attachment to any worldly thing, how can you expect to be able to transcend this world?

## Explained by Master YongHua

Let me tell you a story.

In a prior life, Shakyamuni Buddha was born as the son of the emperor's chaplain. He grew up and learned all the arts and knowledge. The emperor was very fond of him and appointed him to succeed his father as the emperor's chaplain and bestowed upon him riches and honors.

The emperor was most fond of his number one concubine.

It turns out that our young chaplain was also smitten by her incomparable beauty. Think about it, this is the emperor's girlfriend. We are not supposed to look at her long enough to fall in love with her!

The young chaplain's rivals in the court found out and quickly reported it to the emperor.

So the emperor called in the young chaplain and asked him if the rumors were true. The young man said, "She is so irresistible!"

What do you think the emperor did?

Someone said that he ordered his attendant to drag the young lad and lop off his head for this outrageous behavior.

No. The emperor appreciated the chaplain's honesty which is actually a compliment on the emperor's impeccable taste.

So the emperor said, "I understand. I allow you to spend seven days with her to find out for yourself."

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The young chaplain needed no more urging. He grabbed her by the hand and ran away. Time was of the essence.

It turned out that the emperor's favorite concubine fell for the young man's fervor and passion. They therefore decided to elope together.

Imagine how the emperor felt! He lost the most lovely person that he secretly cherished more than riches or kingdom. Furthermore, his most trusted chaplain betrayed him in spite of the emperor's favors.

So, the emperor became severely depressed. He neglected all the state affairs. His aides became alarmed and came up with a ruse.

They organized a fair close to the emperor's palace. As the emperor happened to see the noise and commotion from his windows, he noticed a performer swallowing a razor sharp sword down his throat. That piqued his curiosity. He therefore turned around and asked the Prime Minister, "That is a most remarkable feat. Is there anything more difficult than that?" The Prime Minister replied that he wasn't sure. He then called in the new chaplain who said, "Yes, Sire. It is much more difficult to give the most precious thing that you own." This brought color back to the emperor's face because he could identify with that degree of difficulty. He then asked, "Is there anything else more difficult than giving away your most cherished possession?"

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The chaplain replied, “It is much more difficult to give away your most treasured possession and feel no regret.”

This cured the emperor.

Speaking of security: ALL inhabitants of the Pure Land can attain Buddhahood in one single lifetime! This is explained in the Avatamsaka Sutra, chapter 39, “Entering the Dharma Realm.” Good Wealth Bodhisattva first met with Manjushri to learn basic wisdom 根本智. He then visited the next 52 Good Knowing Advisers to learn separate wisdom 差別智. The very last adviser was Universal Worthy Bodhisattva, who told him to go to the Western Bliss Pure Land in order to perfect all the causes for accomplishing Buddhahood in one life time. This is why the merit and virtue accrued from the first ten limitless practices of Universal Worthy Bodhisattva are then all dedicated toward seeking rebirth to the Pure land.

So far, the sutra has elaborated the wonders of the Pure Land and the benefits it brings to the countless beings who are cultivating there. This helps bring forth the faith. Next the Buddha urges us to make the vow to be reborn there.

*Question:* There are so many Bodhisattva Mahasattvas who are close to accomplishing Buddhahood. Why only mention GuanYin and Great Strength as the next Buddhas and not mention the others?

*Answer:* The Dharma Realm has infinite Buddhalands. As Buddhas enter Nirvana, there must be infinite successors. Furthermore, they take over not only in the Western Pure

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Land but also in other Buddhalands. Even with only two successors, we still cannot conceive of the end of their tenure!

*Sutra Text:*

**Shariputra, those living beings who hear of this should vow: I wish to be born in that country. And why? Those who thus attain are all superior and good people, all gathered in one place. Shariputra, those with few good roots, blessings, and virtues, cannot be born in that land.**

*Sutra Commentary:*

**Shariputra, those living beings who hear of this should vow: I wish to be born in that country. And why?** We should believe in Amitabha's inconceivable vow power. Our cultivation power can come about from deeply believing in that Buddha's merit and virtue. Reciting his name will enable us to utilize his power. We should have deep faith. Then we can make great vows. His vow powers are truly inconceivable. Indeed, it was in virtue of the power of Amitabha's vows that the Western Bliss Pure Land was created. The key here is to have deep faith. If we can unite faith with vows, then it is like having a compass that points to the Western Pure Land.

If one has no faith or belief, no amount of practice can bring about rebirth. If faith and vows are solid then the chances of reciting the Buddha's name ten times with one mind unconfused are pretty high. If you hold on to his name, then even though the wind blows, it cannot penetrate, even when it rains you cannot get wet. The recitation practice can be like a wall

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of metal providing us protection. With such solid samadhi power, one cannot possibly fail to obtain rebirth.

The sutras say that, at the time of death, all of our roots disintegrate. Even our retinues, power and influence, elephants, horses and rare jewels are of no use. Only the vow king remains and will not desert us, guiding us forward such that, in the span of a ksana, we can obtain rebirth to the Western Bliss Pure Land.

*Question:* How do I obtain that vow king?

*Answer:* I'm not sure because I have not obtained rebirth yet.

I believe that it takes making the vow for rebirth repeatedly. Each time, we have to mean it a little bit more. We need to be more sincere each time. Eventually, when we do it long enough, it becomes a vow king.

This is why you notice that every time we cultivate, we keep on making the vow for rebirth.

Good luck!

Even Equal Enlightenment Bodhisattvas in the ten directions make the vow for rebirth to the West, so you can imagine how much more important it is for ordinary folks like us!

Manjushri's short verse on seeking rebirth is quite to the point, "I vow that at the end of life, I'll be able to sever all afflictions, see Amitabha Buddha, and be reborn into the

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Peace and Bliss Buddhaland.” Hurry up and make such a vow! Time is of the essence.

**Those who thus attain are all superior and good people, all gathered in one place. Shariputra, those with few good roots, blessings, and virtues, cannot be born in that land.**

**Superior and good people:** like GuanYin, Great Strength Bodhisattva and other Equal Enlightenment Bodhisattvas! In that land, ordinary people and sages all gather and cultivate together.

Those who hear of this Dharma Door and are able to bring forth the wish to be reborn there have a great amount of blessings. Can you make that vow? If you cannot yet, continue to accrue your blessings. When you have accumulated enough blessings, you too will be able to make the vow.

People with superior roots are the good within the good. The great Shastra mentions five types of Bodhi mind:

1. Bringing Forth Bodhi Mind **發心菩提** : In particular, within the sea of innumerable births and deaths, one can bring forth the mind for Great Bodhi. One can hold the Buddha’s name with one’s mortal mind and give rise to great awakening.
2. Subduing Bodhi **伏心菩提** : By severing all afflictions, one can subdue one’s mind. In fact, it is through reciting the Buddha’s name that proper mindfulness can have the chance to manifest and afflictions will extinguish themselves.

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3. Clear Mind Bodhi 明心菩提 : One clearly understands that all dharmas are not outside the one mind, and that holding the Buddha's name is through that mind, enabling one to clearly understand the true mark.
4. Escape Bodhi 出到菩提 : This refers to attaining the Patience of Non-production, transcending the Triple Realm and arriving at the Buddha's fruition. In fact, holding his name can unlock the Three Patiences, allowing one to horizontally transcend birth and death and unfold the Buddha's wisdom.
5. Unsurpassed Bodhi 無上菩提 : This is also called sitting in the great bodhimanda and certifying to the supreme proper enlightenment. Holding the Buddha's name can help obtain non-regression and directly accomplish Buddhahood.

Superior blessings are blessings within blessings. The phrase 'Amitabha Buddha' is replete with the 10,000 virtues. Recite his name until one mind becomes unscattered and not upside-down. Then naturally the six paramitas are accomplished, because when one attains the Buddha recitation samadhi with one mind unconfused:

1. One is free from jealousy and greed: That is the giving paramita.
2. One is devoid of all evil: That is the precept paramita.
3. One has no anger or resentment: That is the patience paramita.
4. One has no thoughts of laziness: That is the vigor paramita.



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5. One's mind no longer moves: That is the samadhi paramita.
6. One is free from stupidity and darkness: That is the wisdom paramita.

The Vajra sutra says that Bodhisattvas dwell on no mark while practicing giving. That is why their blessings and virtue are countless. This is just blessings within blessings.

In the Western Bliss Pure Land, we are born from transformation on a lotus flower. There are no relatives or family, only Dharma Door retinues. Amitabha Buddha helps decrease birth and death and increase the Way. Our Saha retinues, whether supportive or obstructive, are all just a gathering of enemies. Some are soft enemies, as when we mutually love each other. For instance, when you love me and I love you, then you do not allow me the chance to escape the Triple Realm and are thus a soft enemy who binds me up with the love rope. Others are powerful or hard enemies like our creditors such as evil friends, evil officials, evil thieves, including evil retinues. These hard enemies obstruct our Way karma and will not allow us to engage in pure practices.

When things are as one wishes, we should contemplate them as a dream, an illusion, a bubble or a reflection. When things are not as one wishes, such as when one is slighted or slandered, it is due to offenses committed in the past. One should have fallen to the evil paths and deserves to be slighted. Enduring it extinguishes the prior offenses and will enable one to attain Anuttara-Samyak-Sambodhi. Therefore, one should refrain from blaming or reproaching others. Retributions will go away by themselves. Before you are reborn to the Pure

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Land, if you cannot contemplate retributions as such, you can still recite the Buddha's name. If we can single-mindedly recite the Buddha's name, when we see demons or freaks, we will not be shocked or moved and they will destroy themselves.

*Question:* Maitreya's heavenly palace is incredibly blissful, and full of great co-cultivators, so why do you advise living beings to go to the distant Western Bliss Pure Land?

*Answer:* The Tushita Inner Court is far superior to the human realm. However, compared to the Western Pure Land, it is not as desirable. The Pure Land has ten advantages while the Tushita Heaven palace has ten disadvantages.

The following are the ten advantages of the Western Pure Land has 淨土十勝:

1. The host: Amitabha is the host Buddha.
2. Long lifespan: It is limitless.
3. Land: The Pure Land is not realm bound (as opposed to the Saha world where we are bound by the Triple Realm).
4. No desire: We are free of afflictions.
5. There are no women or children.
6. There is non-retreat in cultivation.
7. It is not defiled: The environment is totally pure.
8. It is extremely adorned.
9. If we are mindful of the Buddha, he will help bring us to his country.
10. Reciting his name ten times can ensure rebirth.

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Maitreya's heavenly palace has ten disadvantages 天宮十劣:

1. Land: It is limited.
2. Lifespan: is much shorter than that in the Pure Land.
3. It is realm bound: It is still part of the Triple Realm.
4. It is a heaven where there still is desire.
5. Both men and women co-habit.
6. The practice is not free from retreat.
7. It is defiled.
8. It certainly is not as adorned as the Pure Land.
9. Good thought gathers sentient beings versus relying on assistance from Amitabha Buddha's vow power.
10. Cultivation is a lot more arduous and not free from suffering.

A butcher was on his death bed. He could see all the cattle that he killed in his life time coming to make claims on him, making his face distort in terror. He asked his wife to seek out help. She asked some monks for advice. They informed him that his karmic debts were so heavy that only reciting Amitabha's name could help. So he began to recite. Pretty soon, he said that all the oxen and cows were gone. He was told to continue to recite. He did and asked his wife to give him some incense to hold as an offering to Amitabha. Pretty soon, he said, "Amitabha has come," and passed away with a smile on his face. This is a case of having enough blessings so that at the end of life, one can encounter a Good Knowing Adviser who can teach one about the Pure Land Dharma Door. Lacking any of the three requisites for rebirth, you will not obtain rebirth.

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There is another anecdote. A man committed offenses all his life. At death, he was supposed to fall to the hells to undergo punishment. His left hand held a fire source and his right hand held incense sticks. He faced the west and recited Amitabha's name. He had not yet finished ten recitations but exclaimed that the Buddha arrived on a jeweled dais. As he finished saying it, he passed away. This is from his prior life's blessings, which made it possible for him, in this life, to encounter a Good Knowing Adviser, bring forth the faith and recite the Buddha's name in earnest and thus obtain rebirth.

Furthermore, the Large Sutra also emphasizes that making the Bodhi vow, in particular the four great vows, is crucial for obtaining rebirth. To reiterate, the four great vows are:

- 1) Sentient beings are limitless, I vow to cross them over.
- 2) Afflictions are inexhaustible, I vow to cut them off.
- 3) The Dharma Doors are immeasurable, I vow to learn them all.
- 4) The Buddha Way is unsurpassable, I vow to realize it.

After making the vow for rebirth, it is critical to uphold the Buddha's name. Each recitation eradicates all sorts of false thinking.

*Question:* The Chan practitioner neither recites the Buddha's name nor seeks rebirth. Does it mean that that individual has less good and fewer blessings?

*Answer:* Such individuals may possess lofty understanding and superior knowledge but may not be able to end birth and

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death this lifetime. They are much better off going for rebirth in such cases. Otherwise, their great blessings cannot free them from the wheel of reincarnation. In the future, their blessings will give them wealth, power and the ability to indulge in desires that are not ultimate. Patriarch YongMing 永明壽祖 said that, of those who practice Chan without Pure Land, 9 out of 10 will go astray 十人九錯路. When the yin states manifest, confusing us, we cannot help but follow along. Please choose your practice carefully!

*Question:* Recite the Buddha's name ten times and obtain rebirth, so says the sutra. Why does it say that, "Those with few good roots, blessings, and virtues, cannot be born in that land?"

*Answer:* Have you tried reciting his name ten times as you were dying? It is not that easy! The proof is that if you did try before, you failed because you are still revolving in the wheel. Better prepare now: without delay practice reciting his name and increase your chances of rebirth.

*Question:* It is said that reciting the Buddha's name generates many good roots, blessings and virtues. Can you cite any sutras that support this view?

*Answer:* I'll quote two references:

1. The Great Compassion Sutra 大悲經 states that to recite the Buddha's name once is to have good roots that are endless and that can help one enter the Great Nirvana.

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2. The Praising the Merit and Virtues of the Buddhas Sutra 稱揚諸佛功德經 tells us that those who get to hear of the Infinite Life Buddha's name and can single-mindedly maintain, recite and be mindful of it, can obtain blessings that are simply countless. They will always leave the three evil paths. At the end of their lives, they will obtain rebirth to his country.

### ***Revealing recitation merits to show cultivation path***

*Sutra Text:*

**Shariputra, if there is a good man or good woman who hears of Amitabha and holds his name whether for one day, two days, three, four, five days, six days, as long as seven days with one mind unconfused, when this person nears the end of life, before him will appear Amitabha and all the Assembly of Holy Ones. When the end comes, his mind will be without inversion, and in Amitabha's Land of Utmost Bliss he will attain rebirth. Shariputra, because I see this benefit, I speak these words; if living beings hear this teaching they should make the vow: I wish to born in that land.**

*Sutra Commentary:*

**Shariputra, if there is a good man or good woman who hears of Amitabha and holds his name whether for one day, two days, three, four, five days, six days, as long as**

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**seven days with one mind unconfused, when this person nears the end of life, before him will appear Amitabha and all the Assembly of Holy Ones.** The previous section exhorts us to make the vow for rebirth. In this section, we are exhorted to start reciting the Buddha's name, just as, when we want to start on a journey, we need to start by taking steps.

**A good man or good woman** holds the five precepts and practices the ten good deeds. They tend to draw near the sangha to assist in their work.

Speaking about men and women and the discernment of genders, the Pure Name Sutra 淨名經觀眾生品 relates a story: Shariputra followed Manjushri to visit the Elder Vimalakirti. He asked a heavenly girl who was scattering flowers in Vimalakirti's room, "Why did you not change out of your female body?" She replied, "For the last twenty years, I have realized that seeking the marks female body cannot be obtained. What is there that can be changed? It's as if a magician made an illusory woman and someone asked her, 'Why don't you change out of your female body?' Is that man's question legitimate?" Shariputra replied, "It is not! The illusion has no fixed mark. Therefore what is there to change?" The heavenly maiden said, "All dharmas are such, and have no fixed marks. Why do you still ask about not changing out of the female body?" Then the heavenly lady used her spiritual powers to change Shariputra to look just like her, and herself to look like just like Shariputra, asking, "Why not change your female body?" Shariputra, who now looked like a heavenly maiden replied, "I do not know how I changed into a female body." The heavenly being said,

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“Shariputra, if this female body can be changed then all female bodies can also be changed. Just as you, Shariputra, are not female but appear as female, so too all women are just like that. Although appearing as women, they are not females. That is why the Buddha said that all the dharmas are neither male nor female.”

Good people, whether men or women, have good roots: To have good roots would tend to put us on the Path for Bodhi. Bodhi bridges both cause and effect. One should also practice various forms of path aiding Dharmas (aiding in accomplishing the Way) such as giving, precepts, and the cultivation of blessings and virtues. Such path aiding Dharmas help one's seeds for Bodhi to mature.

The Two Vehicles have few good Bodhi roots. The Gods and humans create blessings with outflows. Those with few blessings and virtues, although cultivating the paramitas, tend to seek human and heavenly blessings and bliss. They have not penetrated to the unconditioned, and have not yet attained non-outflow. In short, those with few good roots cannot obtain rebirth to the Pure Land.

As for the blessings amongst the blessings: one can consider this to be the Buddha's name which is replete with the 10,000 virtues. Those, whether male or female, young or old, from the six paths or four births (womb, egg, moisture or transformation), if they can hear of the Buddha's name, they have accrued good roots for many kalpas. Without good roots, one will never get to hear of his name. For example, when Shakyamuni Buddha was in the world, he spent a lot of time



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in the capital city of Sravasti which had 900,000 inhabitants. Amongst them:

- 1/3 saw the Buddha and listen to the Dharma.
- 1/3 heard the Buddha's name, but never met him.
- 1/3 did not even hear of him.

The Avatamsaka Sutra underscores the importance of speaking Dharma. It says that if no one speaks the Buddhadharma for us, although we may have wisdom, we will not be able to understand nor will we be able to end suffering.

That is why the sutra states that the causes and conditions for rebirth must include all three requisites of faith, vows and practice. With faith in Amitabha's vow and practice power, one makes a vow for rebirth and then recites his name. Reciting his name time after time creates unsurpassed blessings and virtues.

The objective of the practice is to reach the state of having **one mind unconfused**. If one is able to do so, then one will obtain inconceivable blessings and virtues, and at the end of one's life, one will receive help from the Buddha and the assembly of sages. Furthermore, to have literary wisdom is to hear and then have faith and make the vow. To have contemplative wisdom is to be able to recite the Buddha's name while being mindful of him, thought after thought without interruption.

**One day, two days, three, four, five days, six days, as long as seven days with one mind unconfused.** Those with sharp roots can obtain the Buddha recitation samadhi within one day. Those with dull roots may need seven days or more be-

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fore entering samadhi. Middle roots will be somewhere in between.

The other texts differ with respect to the length of time and the Dharmas recommended in order to obtain the Buddha recitation samadhi.

The Large Sutra states that lay people should eat a vegetarian diet and maintain precepts purely for ten days and nights, single-mindedly reciting the Buddha's name the whole time without interruption, and without even taking a break to sleep. These people will obtain rebirth in the Pure Land.

The Drum Sound King Sutra 鼓音聲王經 also refers to ten days of cultivation. If we can receive and uphold the Buddha's name, make our mind firm and durable, and can be mindful and not forget the Buddha's name for ten days and nights and expel all scatteredness, then we will certainly see Amitabha Buddha.

The Great Collection Sutra 大集經 refers to 49 days of practice. If we can single-mindedly be mindful of (any) Buddha's name, whether sitting or standing, for 49 days, and if we can see the Buddha while in samadhi, then we will obtain rebirth this lifetime.

The Ordinary Vessel Samadhi Sutra 般舟三昧經 mentions 90 days of cultivation. If we vow to stand and sit for 90 days (half standing and half sitting) with one mind earnestly recit-

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ing the whole time 一心繫念, we will enter samadhi and be able to see Amitabha.

The Manjushri Prajna Sutra 文殊般若經 also talks about 90 days of cultivation 九旬. If we can sit upright for 90 days facing west, and single-mindedly be mindful of the Buddha, then we will be able to enter samadhi when our gongfu becomes deep.

In brief, one's gongfu has to be deep enough, whether for one day or only for ten single-minded repetitions, to obtain help from Buddha 得接引.

The Large Sutra says that Dharma Treasury Bhikshu vowed that those who can recite his name with one mind, even only for one day and night without interruption, will definitely obtain rebirth in his land.

As for lay people who tend to be pressed for time, if they can sit upright, facing west, and recite his name for ten breaths every morning and night, they too can obtain rebirth.

The Buddha Recitation Dharma is such that if we can be single-minded, whether for a long time or a very short time, then we can be reborn in the Western Bliss Pure Land.

Furthermore, the Contemplating the Buddha Samadhi Sutra 觀佛三昧海經 says that accomplishing the Buddha recitation samadhi has five causes and conditions:

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1. Holding precepts without any violations 持戒不犯.
2. Not giving rise to deviant views 不起邪見.
3. Not flattering, not being arrogant 不生諂慢.
4. Not getting angry, not getting jealous 不恚不嫉.
5. Being valiant and vigorous 勇健精進.

This Buddha recitation samadhi is also called one mind unconfused. One mind has the following aspects:

- One: only, purely one. Not two or more.
- Single-mindedly focusing on the Buddha's name.
- The mind is not mixed or scattered.
- Both mouth and mind recite.
- If not scattered then it is called one mind.

Unconfused means:

- No false thinking.
- To attain samadhi.

*Question:* How can I recite Buddha's name in order to obtain great benefits?

*Answer:* Recite with absolute deadly determination.

*Question:* What is deadly determination?

*Answer:* Just do it and you will know. If you do it then you will understand. It cannot be easily described.

However, it doesn't hurt to try explaining.

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The mind is fundamentally agile, magical and able. So how can we have deadly determination? Just stop dwelling on love, fame, money, etc., and instead concentrate on reciting the Buddha's name. The ancients have a saying: "Get to the point of putting false-thinking to death and seek to obtain life for the Dharma body." For example, the thief who can put an end to his stealing mind can become a proper person. If the mind is really dead, who is reciting Buddha's name?

Reciting the Buddha's name can be classified into two aspects:

- 1) Phenomenon 事持: After hearing of the Pure Land Dharma, one brings forth deep faith without skepticism. One recites single-mindedly, clearly, thought after thought, whether sitting, standing, lying down or walking. There is no other thought but the Buddha's name. Though there is only one thought, one has not yet penetrated the noumenon.

If one can maintain the Buddha's name this way, one can sever all afflictions and do away with view and thought delusions. One can then be reborn to the first two types of Pure Lands: Ordinary and Sages Cohabiting and the Pure Land of Expedients.

Phenomenon recitation can also be elaborated in light of the Four Complete Givings. Listening to Shakyamuni speak, we bring forth deep belief and make a vow for rebirth. We then practice and experience bliss from our practice; this is the happiness benefit. Simul-

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taneously, we plant seeds of goodness; this is the goodness benefit and gives rise to a sense of abhorrence for the turbidities, which is the destroying evil benefit. Ultimately, we enter the principles and become enlightened; this is the entering the profound principles benefit.

- 2) Noumenon 理持: As above, one recites to the utmost until one enters emptiness. One then is able to understand that outside of the mind that recites, there is no Buddha. And outside of the Buddha, there is no mind that can recite. Mind and Buddha are one and the same, one same substance. One recites and yet does not recite. Conversely, one does not recite and yet recites, thus penetrating the principles.

At this stage, one is no longer confused by the two extremes of existence and emptiness. One can continue to recite until one sees one's own Buddha nature. We can then be reborn into the latter two types of Pure Lands: The Actual Reward Without Obstructions and Permanently Still and Bright Pure Lands.

Noumenon recitation is attained after phenomenon recitation is attained.

According to the Bringing Forth the Faith Shastra, recitation can be done with three types of mind:

- 1) Straight mind 直心: One is properly mindful of True Suchness, without confusion, and falls neither into existence recitation (落有念 if there is a Buddha one

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cannot dwell there!) nor into non-existence recitation (落無念 if there is no Buddha then quickly walk on).

One should attach to neither existence nor non-existence, but rather stay in the Middle Way.

- 2) Deep mind 深心: To enjoy accruing all good dharmas and cultivate all the six paramitas and 10,000 Dharmas. Such a mind is without confusion. The sutras say that of all the good, mind comes first. Maintain goodness in your mind and all the other Dharmas will follow.
- 3) Great compassion mind 大悲心: To obtain samadhi and widely cross over all living beings.

The Buddha recitation is both a gradual and a sudden Dharma Door.

The Manjushri Prajna Sutra says, “The Buddha told Manjushri, ‘If you wish to enter the One Conduct Samadhi 一行三昧, you should dwell in secluded and deserted places, renounce the chaotic mind, not grasp at marks and appearances, anchor your mind on one Buddha and single-mindedly recite his name. You should also sit upright facing west. If you can continuously be mindful of that one Buddha, then you will be able to see all the Buddhas of the past, present and future.’” To be mindful of one Buddha’s merit and virtue is no different from being mindful of all the Buddhas’ merit and virtue: it is identical. The Dharma that Ananda heard is limitless. If one obtains the One Conduct Samadhi then all sutras and Dharma Doors can be known and differentiated, and can be

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understood. One can speak and proclaim them day and night. One's wisdom and eloquence will be truly inexhaustible.

文殊般若經云：佛告文殊：欲入一行三昧者，應處空閒，捨諸亂意，不取相貌，繫心一佛，專稱名字；隨彼方所，端身正向。能於一佛，念念相續，即是念中能見過去未來現在諸佛；念一佛功德，與念無量佛功德無二。阿難所聞說法，猶住量數。若得一行三昧，諸經法門，一切分別，皆悉了知。晝夜宣說，智慧辯才，終不斷絕。

Furthermore, if you recite the Buddha's name, there is no need to do contemplation. The contemplation Dharma is profound and subtle whereas the minds of living beings are scattered. However, it is difficult to accomplish the contemplation Dharma using a scattered mind. That is why the Contemplation Sutra lists out the sixteenth contemplation as reciting the Buddha's name.

又但稱名號，不勞觀想。因觀法幽微，眾生心雜，雜心修觀，觀想難成。故觀經於第十六大開稱名之門。

In addition, if we recite the Buddha's name, there is no need to investigate a topic. We only need to take that Buddha's name as if it were a raft being used to cross the ocean. We dare not let go of it, even for the briefest of an instant. Our mouth recites and our mind focuses. Each syllable originates



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from the mind and is enunciated by the mouth. Our mind is clear and bright, not murky and not scattered. There are also two more analogies. First, to recite the Buddha's name is like a cat watching a mouse. Its spirit is totally aroused and its hair stands on end. Secondly, reciting the Buddha's name is like a chicken hatching its eggs. The hen puts down all other thoughts, totally oblivious to thirst or hunger. If you can recite like this, although it's phenomenon recitation, not only can you be assured of rebirth, but you are also bound to awaken to the principles as well. As Kong Gu Chan Master said, "There is no need to investigate who is reciting the Buddha's name. Directly strive for becoming single-minded and one day you'll be enlightened."

又但稱名號，不假參究，將一句佛號，當作渡海浮囊，不敢頃刻放捨。口誦心惟，字字從心發出，從口吐出，分分明明，不昏不散。更有二喻：念佛之法當如貓捕鼠，提起全副精神，身毛皆豎。又當如雞抱卵，放下一切思想，飲啄渾忘。果能如是念佛，雖為事念，不但往生可必，而悟理亦自可期。如空谷禪師云：不必參念佛是誰，直爾純一念去，亦有悟日是也。

Moreover, if you can recite the Buddha's name and investigate, then it is called Pure Land and Chan parallel cultivation. We are not neglecting phenomenon or noumenon recitation. Rather, it's like riding a boat to the west, in that we rely both on rowing with oars (Chan) as well as wind power (recitation). Yong Ming Shou Chan Master said, "With Pure Land and Chan together, it's like a tiger with horns: this life one is a

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teacher of men and, in the future, one will become a patriarch.” However, when investigating, there is no need to investigate another topic. One only needs to look at the Buddha’s name.

While reciting the Buddha’s name one should contemplate that outside of the mind that can recite (subject), there is no Buddha that is recited (object), and outside of the Buddha being recited (object), there is no mind that can recite (subject). Both subject and object disappear, and the marks of the self and Buddha merge.

If you say that they exist, then the mind that can recite is apart from form and severed from marks; and one understands that the Buddha being recited cannot be obtained. If you say that they are empty, then the mind that can recite is nimble and not murky; and the Buddha that is recited is clear, distinctive and bright. Both existence and emptiness are not separate and mind and Buddha are of one substance.

If one investigates like this, then reciting the Buddha’s name can be called Real Mark recitation. Although, of the four kinds of recitation of the Buddha’s name, the latter forms are more profound than the earlier ones, when noumenon recitation is accomplished, then the earlier forms are connected directly to the latter ones.

又持名倘能更加參究，則禪淨雙修，理事不廢，如駕西方船，既仗櫓棹之功，更益風帆之力，直赴蓮池海會，自可指日而待也。如永明壽祖曰：有禪有淨土，猶如帶角虎，現世為人師，來生作佛祖。但參究之法，不必別舉話頭，只

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消向一句阿彌陀佛上看到。正當念佛之時，即念反觀：能念心外，無有佛為我所念；所念佛外，無有心能念於佛；能所雙亡，心佛相即。又若言其有？則能念之心，離形絕相；所念之佛，了不可得。若言其空？則能念之心，靈靈不昧；所念之佛，歷歷分明；空有不立，心佛一體。如是參究，則持名念佛，通乎實相。雖然四種念佛，後後深於前前；而理念功成，亦可前前徹於後後也。

**When the end comes, his mind will be without inversion, and in Amitabha's Land of Utmost Bliss he will attain rebirth.** The people who have attained the Buddha recitation samadhi will be able see the Buddha come to greet them. This is self-power. Furthermore, the Large Sutra states that Dharma Store Bhikshu vowed that when he becomes a Buddha, the Gods and humans in all the worlds of the ten directions who have already brought forth the Bodhi mind, cultivated all sorts of merit and virtues, and made the vow to be reborn in the land of Utmost Bliss will, at their death, see the Buddha and the Assembly of Sages come and bring them back to the Pure Land. This is others-power.

Depending on the level of their self-power, they get reborn to one of the four Pure Lands:

1. Sages and Commoners Cohabiting Pure Land: these people have not yet subdued self-attachment.

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2. Expedients Pure Land with Residues: reserved for those accomplished practitioners of the Two Vehicles.
3. Actual Reward Adorned Pure Land: for the Bodhisattvas who are no longer attached to emptiness or existence.
4. Permanently Still Bright Pure Land: when one is totally free from ignorance.

What evidences do we have? After death, the body becomes cold from the two feet on up, the top of the head being the last portion to cool off, as the eighth consciousness leaves through there. Those with superior roots have no need to go through an Intermediate Skandha body, but rather can be reborn to the Pure Land in an instant, in a single thought, on a lotus dais by transformation.

One is reborn into various grades depending on one's level of gongfu and blessings. Note that there is no need to do the three contemplations, just recite the Buddha's name!

There is an old saying that gives us clues about our rebirth realms: “佛頂眼生天，人心餓鬼腹，畜生在兩膝，地獄腳板出。” The last part of the body to remain warm gives some indication as to where we will be reborn.

- Top of the head: Birth to the Buddhas' Pure Lands.
- Eyes/forehead: Birth into the Heavens.
- Heart: Birth to the Human realm.
- Stomach: Falling to the Hungry Ghosts realm.
- Knees: Falling to the Animal realm.
- Bottom of the feet: Sinking down to the hells.

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*Question:* Since the Contemplation Sutra emphasizes contemplation, why did we say that there is no need to contemplate?

*Answer:* The answer also comes from the very same sutra, which describes various forms of contemplation (like the Reward body described in the Amitabha's praise verse) that perhaps the ordinary people would have a hard time cultivating to success. The thirteenth contemplation describes an "inferior image 劣像" contemplation (eight foot golden body 丈六八尺之像身). However, those with heavy karmic obstructions cannot succeed at this Dharma. Hence the sixteenth contemplation teaches the recitation Dharma which is very suitable for our Dharma Ending Age when living beings' karmic obstructions are particularly heavy.

The Contemplation Sutra's lower grade rebirth chapter 下品往生章 states that even a stupid man, if he can encounter a Good Knowing Adviser at the end of his life who urges him to recite the Buddha's name, and if he can recite ten full times with utmost sincerity and without interruption, then each recitation will eradicate eighty hundred million eons of birth and death offenses. After his death, he will see a golden lotus as big as the sun appear in front of him and in the space of a thought, he will obtain rebirth.

Although in the Dharma Ending Age living beings may have dull roots, they are nonetheless still replete with their Buddha nature. The Buddha's image and Amitabha's name are not

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beyond the mind. It is the mind that creates the Buddha image 是心作佛. That mind is the Buddha 是心是佛. It is that mind that creates the Buddha's name 是心作名. That mind is the Buddha's name 是心是名. The sutra says that all the Thus Come Ones are the body of the Dharma Realm. They enter all living beings' minds and thoughts. Therefore, when we think of the Buddha, that mind is just the 32 hall-marks and eighty subtle characteristics. That mind creates the Buddha 是心作佛. That mind is the Buddha 是心是佛.

*Question:* Why should we contemplate the hua tou, “Who is reciting the Buddha’s name?” as taught by the Patriarchs?

*Answer:* It is taught to us out of compassion and it provides another means to help us suddenly awaken from our stupor to the Amitabha Buddha of our self-nature.

*Question:* How does one know that Amitabha’s appearance is not a demon?

*Answer:* When his image appears without reciting the Buddha’s name, that is definitely a demon. The Shurangama Sutra states, “If the demons come while you are cultivating Samatha and Vipasyana , then rinse your mind of deviant views.” That’s why the Chan school has a dictum, “魔來魔斬, 佛來佛斬: if the demons come, cut their heads off; if the Buddha comes, cut his head off.”

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*Question:* Reciting seven days without inversion, that's during our life time?

*Answer:* Yes.

*Question:* Afterwards, if again one gives rise to confusion and creates offenses, can one still be reborn?

*Answer:* Afterwards, one does not give rise to confusion in one's mind. At least, one can learn to perfect the skill to enter that Buddha recitation samadhi that will make one impervious to afflictions, praise or slander, gain or loss, and good or evil, etc. One then will be able to restrain oneself from giving rise to delusions and creating offenses.

In the Large Sutra, the Ten Recitations Dharma says that every day in the early morning, one rinses one's mouth, offers incense to the four directions, puts one's hands together and makes ten recitations, each in one breath. One also recites during the day 日間無暇念佛. A person who can thus recite in the morning and evening ten times, will obtain rebirth.

There is a saying: “莫待老來方學道，孤墳儘是少年人; *Do not wait until old age to study the Way; half of the solitary tombs are for young people.*” If one does not practice beforehand, the odds of achieving ten recitations without confusion at the time of death are not very good.

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*Question:* The Western Bliss Pure Land is hundreds of thousands of billions of lands away, how can one be reborn there?

*Answer:* It is only as far as a single thought. Such is also the power of the Buddha. This is just like when the sun illuminates the earth—large spans are lit in the space of a thought.

Why do we need all three requisites to obtain rebirth? To have faith alone is not true faith. To make vows but not believe or recite is not to make true vows. Practice alone is not true practice. In fact, there are no definite distinctions between the three. All three are just one.

Although the Contemplation Sutra states that, at the time of death, if one valiantly and sincerely recites ten times, each recitation can erase the offenses of eighty hundred million kalpas of lifetimes, one can obtain the same result at normal times too! Like the bright sun that can dispel the darkness, each recitation's wisdom light can erase one's stupidity karmas.

*Question:* If we recite with a scattered mind, can it still erase karmas or not?

*Answer:* The Buddha's name contains inconceivable power and can certainly erase karmas. But to recite with a scattered mind may not result in rebirth. This is because of having inadequate power to overcome karmic obstructions that have been accumulating since beginningless time. Such poor recitation skill does not have enough force to break those bonds that still bind us back.



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On the other hand, remember the anecdote of the 80 year old man who only recited the Buddha's name once? He did it with a scattered mind and yet when the causes and conditions ripened, he too was crossed over. Imagine how much more effective recitation can be when one is single-minded!

In fact, if our past karmas had form, all of empty space would not be enough to contain them. Even if one were to recite 100,000 times day for one hundred years, and if each recitation eradicated the offenses from 80 hundred million eons of lifetimes, if the eradicated offenses were just like a melon, the remaining ones would be like the earth by comparison.

Confucius' famous disciple Yan Hui would not mentally contradict humaneness for three months straight. He is the only one who could do it while the rest of the disciples could not. Similarly, those who practice reciting the Buddha's name should be able to recite the Buddha's name with one set of recitation beads (108 beads) without any false thoughts in between. That is what Yan Hui could surely do. Being single-minded and having no false thinking is called having good roots and causes and conditions 一心無妄念則名善根因緣.

**Shariputra, because I see this benefit, I speak these words;** The MahaNirvana Sutra says that the Buddha has certified to the eight self-masteries of the I:

1. He can have transformation bodies as many as dust motes.
2. He can appear in all of the Dharma Realm.

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3. His great body can levitate and fly to Buddhalands as numerous as Ganges sands.
4. He can manifest the forms of numberless living beings and yet still be at one place.
5. His six roots (sense organs) have attained self-mastery such that one root can be used interchangeably with any other root.
6. He has obtained all Dharmas and yet does not think that any Dharma has been attained.
7. He can speak Dharma with self-mastery, such that the meaning remains valid even after limitless kalpas.
8. He can go everywhere and yet cannot be seen, like emptiness.

He is replete with the Five Eyes, so that he can “**see the benefits.**” He can see all the ultimate Dharma true marks.

“Benefit”: refers to the absence of confusion; one can clearly understand. In particular, it refers to the benefit of horizontally escaping Samsara, getting rebirth in the Western Bliss Pure Land and certifying to the three non-retreats. In brief, “benefit” refers to the advantages coming from inconceivable merits and virtues. This is at the noumenon level.

At the phenomenon level, “benefit” refers to the fact that at death one is able to rely on a lifetime of recitation power (self-power) and Amitabha’s power to attain a mind without inversion. This is the great benefit. Because of this lack of inversion, one can be reborn to the Land of Utmost Bliss, leave suffering and attain bliss, and end birth and death. In fact, at the end of life, at this critical moment, it is very hard to remain in control. The thinking mind (the sixth conscious-

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ness) is no longer working, and hence one's habit energies swell up from the eighth consciousness. This experience is often very chaotic. That is why practitioners of the Pure Land Dharma Door must cultivate both blessings and wisdom and make the vow for rebirth. At the end of life, naturally one's mind will be free from inversion and will seek the three blessings, wisdom and rebirth. The first two are aiding causes for rebirth.

The Shurangama Sutra says that “pure thought (純想; meaning purely good thoughts and no evil) will fly 即飛: at the end of life, one will surely be born into the heavens. Moreover, if the ascending mind 飛心 is already replete with the three seekings of blessings 兼福, wisdom 兼慧及與, and pure vows 淨願, then naturally the mind will open up 心開, and one will see the Buddhas of the ten directions and be reborn to the Pure Lands.

On the other hand, if one does not know how to cultivate, or if one cultivates the externalist Dharma Doors and thus obtains deviant wisdoms, then one will certainly have no chance for rebirth.

As for those who practice Chan without the aid of Pure Land, though they may be free of deviant wisdom they still have no assurance of rebirth. Regardless of whether they have obtained shallow or deep samadhi, at death, their habit energies may rise up and get them into trouble.

## Explained by Master YongHua

Even the Arhats and Bodhisattvas have their own confusions. Arhats have the confusion that arises from dwelling in the womb 初果羅漢有住胎之昏. The Bodhisattvas have the confusion of the separation of the skandhas. When the previous skandhas are extinguished, they go through the intermediate skandha body and reincarnate in the form of new skandhas, appearing in the world again 菩薩有隔陰之迷. Both will be confused about their prior lives. Those who are reborn to the Western Pure Land would not have this kind of problem since they will have the power to remember past lives, and they can attain Buddhahood in one lifetime there.

The Buddha can see this and thus urges us to make the vow for rebirth.

During the Tang dynasty, at Hui Lin 惠林 temple, Dharma Master Yuan Ze 圓澤和尚 and Mr. Li Yuan 李源 were good friends. Mr. Li did not work and therefore was often at the temple. One day, they both wished to go visit Mount E Mei 峨嵋. Mr. Li wanted to go through Jing Zhou 荊州 but Dharma Master Yuan preferred to go through the valley which required going through the capital. Mr. Li had withdrawn from worldly affairs and therefore did not wish to enter the capital. Dharma Master Yuan yielded to his friend's wish.

One day, their south bound boat ran across a woman fetching water from the river. Dharma Master Yuan cried when he saw the woman. Mr. Li was surprised and inquired. Master

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Yuan said that the woman had been expecting for three years and that he was three years late in becoming her expectant child. If they had not met with her it would not have mattered, however, since they did meet, the Dharma Master could no longer put it off. The Master wished that his friend would visit the family three days later, saying that there he would find a newborn baby who would smile at him as proof. Further, the Dharma Master said that thirteen years later, outside of a Tibetan temple 天竺寺 in Kang Zhou 杭州, they would meet again. Mr. Li was sad and grieved. Dharma Master Yuan bathed and passed away that night.

Three days later, Mr. Li went over to the family. The newborn baby smiled at him. This was the signal that Dharma Master Yuan was reborn in that family. After the Master's funeral, Mr. Li returned to the temple. Thirteen years later Mr. Li went from Luo Yang to Hang Zhou to attend a meeting. There he ran into a kid tending to buffaloes who was reciting a poem:

*“The vows made from three consecutive lives (past, present and future) are to be resolved* 三生石上舊精魂;

*We used to get together to enjoy the moon and taste the wind, but now it's no longer sensible to bring it up (nostalgia for old times spent together)* 賞月吟風莫要論.

*I am ashamed that my old acquaintance has come from so far to see me* 慚愧情人遠相訪;

*This body is different but my soul is still the same* 此身雖異性常存.

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Mr. Li asked him, “Master Yuan, are you well?” The boy said, “Mr. Li, you are a man of your words indeed! Worldly conditions have not yet ended and that is how we suddenly meet again. One only has to sincerely cultivate without laziness to mutually meet again.” The kid then recited another verse, saying, “Whether it’s the prior body or later body, life is very busy. It would be very sad to speak of the causes and conditions. I have crossed rivers and climbed mountains many times. I now wish to return to my old neighborhood. 身前身後事茫茫。欲話因緣恐斷腸。吳越江山遊已遍。卻回煙棹上瞿塘。” Then he disappeared. Mr. Li returned to the temple.

It is not clear whether or not the venerable monk returned to the human realm out of attachment to his best friend or other lofty aspirations. But I hope that you personally will not make the people you love have to come back to the human realm out of concern for you. They would be much better off in the Western Bliss Pure Land; therefore do your best to help them get there as soon as possible.

Master Qing Chan 青禪師 is a great Master of the Chan School. However, although he had the spiritual penetration of knowing his past lives, he still could not break through birth and death, not to mention the rest. Observing someone study the Way, he decided to recite the Buddha’s name, seeking to attain phenomenon and noumenon One Mind Unconfused. He decided to rely on the Buddha’s power to obtain rebirth and no longer relied on his own power alone.

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We should also pay heed. He offers a perspective from an insider. If you can end birth and death then rely on your own power. If you cannot then choose other's help judiciously.

*Question:* If the Buddha is just the mind as previously said, then why do we have to rely on Amitabha's power and not the Buddha of one's self-nature?

*Answer:* The previous statement referred to the Perfect Sudden Dharma Door. The Avatamsaka Sutra says that there is no differentiation between Mind, Buddha and living beings. Buddha is inside living beings' minds. Living beings are just inside the Buddha's mind. All three are fundamentally of one substance. One cultivates this Dharma Door and certifies to its principles as one attains one mind unconfused. Others are not different from oneself, understand that the other Buddha 他佛 is just the Buddha 自佛 of the self-nature. The question reflects the fact that this principle is not yet understood, that's why there still is a differentiation between self and others.

*Question:* Since living beings' offenses are numberless, how can reciting the Buddha's name eradicate obstructions, allowing for rebirth to the Western Bliss Pure Land?

*Answer:* The shastra 十疑論 says that there are three ways to overcome evil offenses:

1. At the mind 在心: We create offenses with the evil and false mind, when we recite the Buddha's name with the true mind, the true can expel the false.

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2. At the state 在境: We create offenses and attach to upside-down states. Reciting, on the other hand, rides on the superior and wonderful merit and virtue of Amitabha. The superior overwhelms the inferior.
3. At the purity 在淨: Although we create offenses with our defiled mind, we recite the Buddha's name with our pure mind, and this purity cleanses our defilements.

The Buddha Recitation Dharma Door is an unsurpassed perfect sudden Dharma Door. Simply recite the Buddha's name. There is no need to think and contemplate. Just recite with a straight-forward mind. Beyond sophistry 戲論, which neither accords with true principles nor has any true principles, reciting the Buddha's name severs all mental activities and views 斬盡一切意見.

This kind of Dharma Door is also highly recommended by cultivators with superior roots.

Mǎ Míng 馬鳴, Horse's Scream, was a Brahmin who was a king for 500 prior lives. He left the home-life and obtained the Dharma under Ven. Punyayaśas 富那夜奢. At that time, the king of the country wanted to eradicate the delusions of the masses and decided to let seven horses go hungry until the morning of the sixth day. He convened all sramanas and scholars from inside and outside the country to listen to Ma Ming's Dharma. All those who were there were awakened. The king tied the hungry horses in front of the assembly with



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grass. However the seven horses shed tears and refused to eat. Apparently, even the seven horses understood, indicating that the speaker was no ordinary monk. That was how the name Ma Ming came about. He was transmitted the Buddha Mind Seal School and was recognized as its twelfth patriarch. He wrote the Great Vehicle Bringing Forth the Faith Shastra 大乘起信論. This says that if one is mindful of the Western Pure Land and Amitabha Buddha and dedicates all the merits and virtues from cultivation towards rebirth to that land, one will obtain rebirth, will often see the Buddha and will not regress. If one contemplates Buddha's Dharma Body, often cultivates vigorously, and dwells in proper samadhi, then one will surely be reborn to the Land of Utmost Bliss.

Lóng Shù 龍樹, or Dragon Tree, Bodhisattva was a tree spirit. On the tree in which he lived, there were 500 dragons listening to the Dharma. Afterwards, he met with Ven. Kapimala 迦毘摩羅 who gave him a mind seal transmission. The Shurangama Sutra says that a bhikshu with great virtues called Dragon Tree attained the First Ground, the Happiness Ground, and was subsequently reborn to the Western Bliss Pure Land.

The mother of Ven. Zhì Zhě 智者, Wise One, dreamt of five-colored fragrant incense. When she gave birth to him, the room was filled with a bright light. At the age of seven, he was verbally taught the Universal Door once and could recite it from memory. Afterwards, he vowed to be a sramana to spread the Buddhadharma. He met with Hùì Sī, Wisdom

## Explained by Master YongHua

Contemplation, Chan Master who said that they used to listen to the Dharma at Líng Shān, Magic Mountain. One day, he recited the Lotus Sutra up to the chapter “Medicine King Bodhisattva’s 藥王菩薩 Story.” When he recited the line, “This is true vigor, this true Dharma offering,” he suddenly entered the Dharma Flower Samadhi and obtained unobstructed wisdom. He later stayed at mount Tian Tai and propagated that school. He recited the Buddha’s name and entered Stillness.

And Great Chan Master Yǒng Míng, Always Bright, was an official who often liberated lives. He was also called Yán Shòu, or Lengthening Life. One day, he was sentenced to death by the King. As his execution approached, he showed no fear and said, “I’ve already saved limitless living beings. I have no regret now that I must die.” The executioner’s blade broke into three when it touched his neck. The King heard of this and pardoned him. Master Yǒng Míng, who at that time was still a layman, then brought forth the mind to leave the home-life, studied in the Tian Tai school and specialized in propagating the Pure Land Dharma Door. He entered Stillness at the age of 72. Later, a monk who was very ill dreamt of King Yama bowing to the image of a monk. He asked who it was that King Yama was bowing to and was informed that it was Master Yǒng Míng because he was reborn to the superior superior grade. Because King Yama venerated the Master’s great virtues, he bowed to his image.

According to the Large Amitabha Sutra 大本三輩, there are three major grades of rebirth:

## Small Amitabha Sutra

1. Superior 上輩: This grade is for those who made the resolve for Bodhi, cultivated all sorts of merit and virtue, vowed for rebirth, and specialized in reciting the Buddha's name. At the end of their lives, the Buddha and Bodhisattvas come to greet them and bring them back to the Pure Land. They are born onto a golden lotus dais, obtain irreversibility, have deep wisdom, and possess vast spiritual penetrations and total self-mastery. They dwell in palaces in the sky made of the seven gems. They constantly draw near the Buddha and accomplish both the phenomenon and noumenon recitations 此雙明事理二念者，方得生此.
2. Middle 中輩: Those who are born into the middle grade did not cultivate great merit and virtue but did make the resolve for Bodhi. They are reborn with lower wisdom. They accomplish the phenomenon recitation but not the noumenon recitation 此事念有餘，理念不足者生此.
3. Lower 下輩: As with the middle grade, those of the lower grade did not create merit and virtue but did make the resolve for Bodhi. They specialize in reciting up to ten recitations. Their palaces are on the ground. 此僅得事念，未諳理念者生此.

Again, it is important to revisit the major **benefits** of the Pure Land Dharma Door that the Buddha sees with his Buddha eyes. While the Arhat is confused at birth 初果昧於出胎 and the Bodhisattva is confused while in the womb 菩薩昏

## Explained by Master YongHua

于隔陰, the Pure Land Dharma Door can affect a horizontal escape of the five turbidities, allowing one to immediately obtain irreversibility. Even at the end of a Pure Land cultivator's life, their mind is unconfused. Their life has not been in vain. These are “without-outflow” benefits. Living beings can carry their karma along with them when they are reborn. This is only because they do not realize that karmas have no real nature. The Shurangama Sutra states that one can suddenly awaken to the principles but the phenomenon must be cultivated gradually.

**If living beings hear this teaching they should make the vow: I wish to born in that land.** Those who really believe the Buddha's words should not hesitate and make the vow for rebirth.

Next we go into the certification portion of the sutra.

Only the Buddhas can understand the inconceivable merit and virtues of this sutra, that is why it was spoken without request. The Buddhas of the six directions all give such confirmation.

### ***Citing Buddhas' praises to sever one's doubts***

*Sutra Text:*

**Shariputra, just as I now praise the inconceivable benefits arising from the merit and virtue of Amitabha, so too in the east does Akshobya Buddha, Sumeru Appearance**

## Small Amitabha Sutra

**Buddha, Great Sumeru Buddha, Sumeru Light Buddha, Wonderful Sound Buddha. All Buddhas such as these, numberless as Ganges' sands, each in his own country, brings forth a vast and long tongue that covers the three thousand great thousand worlds and proclaims these sincere and true words: "All you living beings should believe in this sutra which all the Buddhas praise for its inconceivable merit and virtue, and of which they are protective and mindful."**

*Sutra Commentary:*

**Shariputra, just as I now praise the inconceivable benefits arising from the merit and virtue of Amitabha,**

**Inconceivable** (benefits from Amitabha's merit and virtue) has five meanings:

1. To horizontally transcend the three realms: There is no need to wait until delusions are ended.
2. The Western Pure Land is replete with the four Pure Lands. All can suddenly certify to the three non-retreats and do not have to gradually certify to them. We can attain Buddhahood in one lifetime.
3. We only need to recite the Buddha's name: There is no need to do Chan, contemplate or practice other expedient Dharma Doors.
4. For a time period of one to seven days: There is no need to go through many kalpas, many lifetimes, many years or months of cultivation.
5. To recite one Buddha's name results in having all Buddhas becoming mindful of you. It is just the same as reciting all of their names. All Buddhas share in

## Explained by Master YongHua

each other's merit and virtue, anyway. Amitabha's merit and virtue are just Shakyamuni's, or any other Buddha's.

This sutra is certified by all the Buddhas as containing the Pure Land Dharma Door. The sutra then lists out the names of the Buddhas of the six directions who all speak with the same sound, but from different mouths, to praise it. Therefore, one should not be skeptical and should instead bring forth deep faith.

First the east is mentioned because it represents the leader of all movements 群動之首, symbolizing the spring time when the 10,000 things are born.

The Buddhas have limitless virtues and therefore should have limitless names. Names are false names but virtues are real. Their names are either established in accord with living beings 隨機而立, or based on causal practice 因行, fruition virtue 果德, nature, mark, vows or practices.

The six directions symbolize all ten directions.

**So too in the east does Akshobya Buddha, Sumeru Appearance Buddha, Great Sumeru Buddha, Sumeru Light Buddha, Wonderful Sound Buddha**

**Akshobya** means “unmoving and eternally dwelling Dharma body.” His dharma body is unmoving and dwells eternally. ‘Unmoving’ means it cannot be moved by the eight winds,

## Small Amitabha Sutra

which are so called because they are what worldly people love or hate and hence what makes their minds move. The winds are as follows:

1. Gain 利: This is a real obsession for most of us.
2. Loss 衰: Most people cannot stand taking a loss.
3. Defamation 毀: This arises from loathing another person and fabricating words to discredit and hurt them.
4. Eulogy 譽: This arises from liking another person and feeling compelled to use good words to extoll his deeds, especially when they are not present.
5. Praise 稱: In an attempt to promote or recommend another person, we publicly extoll his good points.
6. Defamation 譏: Because of disliking another individual, although there is no such fact, we fabricate stories and tell the multitudes.
7. Suffering 苦: This has an oppressive connotation. We encounter evil conditions and evil states which oppress our body and mind.
8. Happiness 樂: Also known as bliss, it makes the mind happy. We encounter favorable conditions and states which bring pleasure to the body and mind.

There is a saying: “When body and limbs are still, at ease, at peace and unmoving, the eight winds blow but cannot move the mind 身體及手足，寂然安不動，八風吹不動”

## Explained by Master YongHua

This Buddha cannot be moved by the three evil paths. He is always in samadhi, unmoving. This is Medicine Master Buddha.

**Sumeru Appearance Buddha:** Sumeru means “wonderfully high.”

Mt. Sumeru is “wonderful” because it is made of the four jewels: gold, silver, lapis lazuli and crystal, symbolizing the fact this Buddha’s body is replete with blessings and adornments and the light of his hallmarks is brilliant.

“Tall” because there is no taller mountain. This Buddha’s appearance is as lofty as Mt. Sumeru. This symbolizes the fact that the remaining nine realms (the Bodhisattva Realm, Pratyekabuddha Realm, Arhat Realm, God Realm, Human Realm, Asura Realm, Animal Realm, Hungry Ghost Realm and Hells) admire him because his blessings and wisdom are complete.

**Great Sumeru Buddha:** Mount Sumeru is the King of mountains. It is 84,000 yojanas 由旬 tall and is the tallest mountain under the heavens. Similarly, this Buddha’s virtues are unsurpassed and he is supremely venerated in the Dharma Realm. Or it could also be said that this Buddha is the Great Dharma King and is most venerated in all other nine realms.

**Sumeru Light Buddha:** Since Mount Sumeru is made of the four jewels, it is incredibly brilliant. This Buddha’s 10,000 virtues are complete and their light shines universally. He has



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turned his eight consciousnesses into the four wisdoms that universally shine on all living beings.

**Wonderful Sound Buddha:** His sound is perfect and wonderful and is far better than any other living being's. His one sound is replete with all the living beings' sounds. The Pure Name Sutra 淨名經 says that the Buddha uses one sound to proclaim the Dharma, causing living beings of various kinds each to attain their own appropriate understanding 佛以一音演說法，眾生隨類各得解. Furthermore, with the same sound, each understands differently. Great roots achieve great understanding. They hear it as Great Vehicle Dharma. Shallow roots attain shallow understanding. They perceive his teaching to be in the realm of the Hinayana. Each has his own certification, self-mastery and accomplishment.

**All Buddhas such as these, numberless as Ganges' sands, each in his own country brings forth a vast and long tongue that covers the three thousand great thousand worlds and proclaims these sincere and true words:** Buddhas in the eastern direction such as those mentioned, as many as the Ganges sands, all praise this sutra.

**Sands** are used to symbolize a countless amount.

**Ganges** also symbolizes “many.” It has plenty of sand. People universally consider its water as blessing water. They traditionally wade in and wash themselves in the belief that it will eradicate offenses. Some believe that putting dead peo-

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ple in it will make them ascend to the heavens. Although it has been destroyed countless times, its name permanently subsists. Buddhas often go around there to speak Dharma. Finally, this river is a place of reliance for the multitudes.

**Vast and long tongue** means:

1. Truth being told.
2. It pervades everywhere.

If one can strictly uphold the non-lying precept for three lifetimes, one's tongue can reach one's nose. The Buddhas cultivated purely for three asamkhyeya kalpas. It is no wonder that their tongue can be that big. It is one of the hallmarks of the Buddhas. "Vast" refers to the width while "long" refers to its length. Their tongues are soft, supple, red and wide.

**Cover** means to surround 遍 and cover up 覆.

**The three thousand great thousand worlds** refers to a Buddhaland.

The Avatamsaka Sutra, Leaving the World Chapter 離世間品 says that Bodhisattvas' tongues have ten qualities:

1. Their tongues can distinguish, speak and explain (分別解說一切眾生無盡舌) for all types of living beings endlessly.
2. They can speak and explain the endless Dharma Doors.
3. They can praise the Buddhas' endless merit and virtue.
4. They have limitless eloquence in speaking Dharma.

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5. They can speak and expound on the endless Great Vehicle Dharma Doors.
6. They can universally cover all of empty space in the ten directions.
7. They can universally shine on all the Buddhalands.
8. They can impartially praise all living beings.
9. They can follow and accord with all the Buddhas, making them rejoice.
10. They can tame and subdue all the demons and externalists, extinguish birth and death, and enable one to reach Nirvana.

Bodhisattvas who accomplish the above-mentioned Dharmas will obtain the Thus Come One's unsurpassed tongue that can cover three thousand great thousand worlds.

Therefore, the vast and long tongue thus described is obtained through cultivation. The Big Vehicle principles and Dharma Doors require vast and long tongues to praise them.

**Proclaims these sincere and true words:** Do not be skeptical! The Buddhas only speak the truth. The ancients say: “Literature can be detailed or summarized 文有詳略, true principles neither increase nor diminish 義無增減.”

**“All you living beings should believe in this sutra which all the Buddhas praise for its inconceivable merit and virtue, and of which they are protective and mindful.”**

**All of you:** The eastern direction has limitless worlds. To mention it means:

## Explained by Master YongHua

1. The Buddhas of the ten directions address their own inhabitants.
2. Shakyamuni Buddha addresses us, quoting the other Buddhas' instructions. They all certify the existence of the Western Pure Land to help those present in the Pure Land Dharma Assembly bring forth faith and respect.

The Buddhas are mindful of those who recite this sutra:

1. Such people obtain the Buddha's protection.
  - a. Therefore they are more peaceful and stable.
  - b. And they have no obstructions and difficulties.
2. Such people also obtain the Buddha's mindfulness.
  - a. Thus they become more vigorous.
  - b. And they will not regress or fall.

The protection is not received from Amitabha Buddha, but from all the Buddhas of the ten directions.

*Question:* The other Buddhas did not speak this sutra, why should they be mindful and protective?

*Answer:* The king's words are commands. The Buddha's words become the sutra. They all praise the Western Pure Land. Shakyamuni speaks of the Amitabha Sutra. All the other Buddhas speak of the same. They are all mindful and protective of this unsurpassed Dharma Door which can save countless living beings.

*Question:* Why not invite all the Buddhas?

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*Answer:* Their state is different from ours. They did not come but actually did. The Dharma Body pervades the Dharma Realm, they neither have to go nor come anywhere!

*Sutra Text:*

**Shariputra, in the Southern World, Sun-Moon Lamp Buddha, Well-Known Light Buddha, Great Blazing Shoulders Buddha, Sumeru Lamp Buddha, Measureless Vigor Buddha, all Buddhas such as these, numberless as Ganges' sands, each in his own country brings forth a vast and long tongue that covers the three thousand great thousand worlds and proclaims these sincere and true words: “All you living beings should believe in this sutra which all the Buddhas praise for its inconceivable merit and virtue, and of which they are protective and mindful.”**

*Sutra Commentary:*

**Shariputra, in the Southern World, Sun-Moon Lamp Buddha, Well-Known Light Buddha, Great Blazing Shoulders Buddha, Sumeru Lamp Buddha, Measureless Vigor Buddha...** Going clock-wise, the Buddhas of all the other directions also praise and protect this sutra.

The southern direction also has countless Buddhas in countless Buddhahands, all of whom praise the Pure Land Dharma Door. Here only five of these Buddhas are mentioned.

**Sun-Moon Lamp Buddha** is named according to the Three Wisdoms: True, Mundane and Middle. His body light and

## Explained by Master YongHua

wisdom light illuminate within and without. The sun illuminates the day and nurtures the ten thousand things. It symbolizes the Buddha's Mundane Wisdom which illuminates the phenomenon and enables living beings to accomplish the Way. The moon illuminates the night and can dispel all darkness, symbolizing the Buddha's True Wisdom which illuminates the principles, destroying and eradicating all ignorance. A lamp can illuminate both day and night as one wishes 隨意受用, symbolizing the Middle Wisdom.

**Well-Known Light Buddha 名聞光佛:** His name encompasses the 10,000 virtues and is well-known throughout the Dharma Realm. Well-known 名聞 refers to his name which has great renown. Light 光 refers to his light, which illuminates inside and outside. His kindness light universally shines, aiding and protecting all living beings. His name and light universally shine on the four Pure Lands. Living beings who hear of his name or encounter his light will obtain enlightenment.

**Great Blazing Shoulders Buddha** emits light from his shoulders. This Buddha got his name from the Two Wisdoms, the actual and provisional. These two wisdoms emit great light, hence "great blazing." "Shoulders" has the connotation of being able to shoulder heavy loads. This Buddha uses the great blazing light from the Two Wisdoms to burn up the afflictions of the great number of living beings.

**Sumeru Lamp Buddha:** His body light is like that of a lamp which can destroy darkness. He is named after the four wis-

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doms. Mount Sumeru is made from the four jewels, each having its own light that can illuminate like a lamp. This symbolizes the fact that the Buddha transformed his eight consciousnesses into the four wisdoms: the sixth consciousness becomes the Wonderful Observing Wisdom, the seventh consciousness becomes the Equal Nature Wisdom, the first five consciousnesses become the Accomplishing What is to be Done Wisdom, and the eighth consciousness becomes the Great Perfect Mirror Wisdom. The sixth and seventh consciousnesses are first to be transformed through causes 因中先轉, while the rest are transformed as a result of retributions 果上方圓. His four wisdom light can destroy the Three Delusions: view delusions, thought delusions and ignorance 見思、塵沙、無明.

**Measureless Vigor Buddha** is named after his practices. “Measureless” means that he went through three asamkhyeya kalpas practicing the six paramitas. Time and practice are both measureless. At his causal grounds, he is always vigorous, fearless and never retreats.

**All Buddhas such as these, numberless as Ganges' sands, each in his own country brings forth a vast and long tongue that covers the three thousand great thousand worlds and proclaims these sincere and true words: “All you living beings should believe in this sutra which all the Buddhas praise for its inconceivable merit and virtue, and of which they are protective and mindful.”** Again all the Buddhas of the ten directions provide certification to this Dharma Door.

## Explained by Master YongHua

Now that you've heard of this wonderful Pure Land Dharma Door, you must not waste the opportunity. Bring forth real efforts to practice it.

### *Sutra Text:*

**Shariputra, in the Western World, Measureless Life Buddha, Measureless Appearance Buddha, Measureless Banner Buddha, Great Light Buddha, Great Brightness Buddha, Jeweled Appearance Buddha, Pure Light Buddha, all Buddhas such as these, numberless as Ganges' sands, each in his own country, brings forth a vast and long tongue that covers the three thousand great thousand worlds and proclaims these sincere and true words: "All you living beings should believe in this sutra which all the Buddhas praise for its inconceivable merit and virtue, and of which they are protective and mindful."**

### *Sutra Commentary:*

**Shariputra, in the Western World, Measureless Life Buddha, Measureless Appearance Buddha, Measureless Banner Buddha, Great Light Buddha, Great Brightness Buddha, Jeweled Appearance Buddha, Pure Light Buddha...** The Western direction has measureless Buddhas who also praise the Pure Land Dharma Door. The sutra only lists seven.

**Measureless Life Buddha** is Amitabha Buddha. He also praises Shakyamuni Buddha for speaking this sutra. The other meaning is that the Buddhas of the ten directions are num-



## Small Amitabha Sutra

berless. If they are named, say based on their numberless virtues, it is not unusual for many Buddhas to share the same name.

*Question:* Even Confucians avoid praising themselves. Why does Amitabha describe himself as inconceivable?

*Answer:* Not only Amitabha but all Buddhas praise this Pure Land Dharma Door. Even if Amitabha praises himself, what harm is there if it can positively influence living beings, making them aspire for rebirth? Unlike ordinary people, the Buddhas work with facts and do not engage in self-promotion.

**Measureless Appearance Buddha** has limitless marks. His name is based on his appearance: he has measureless hallmarks. His response body has 32 hallmarks while his Reward body has measureless hallmarks. Each Buddha has three bodies, each with measureless marks.

**Measureless Banner Buddha** is adorned with numberless jeweled banners. Both the measure of his body and its merit and virtue are tall and most adorned like a banner. His name is based on the Dharma. “Banner” contains the meaning of “breaking the deviant and revealing the proper.” This Buddha established measureless Dharmas that act like banners to destroy the deviant and institute the proper Dharma. Living beings have measureless levels of potentials. That is why he speaks of measureless Dharmas to cross them over, henceforth the name Measureless Banner.

## Explained by Master YongHua

**Great Light Buddha:** His name is based on wisdom 智.

One could also say that it is based on mark 相. His body and wisdom lights illuminate everything. The light of purity penetrates everywhere. It is still and yet illuminates all of empty space, belonging to the wisdom light. As for his body light, it is constantly emitting light and illuminating long distances as well as particulars. The Lotus Sutra mentions one such example in which the white hair hallmark light can illuminate the eighteen thousand hundred million Buddha lands of the eastern direction. Like Shakyamuni Buddha, before speaking the Dharma, Great Light Buddha would emit light. The light of this Buddha's great wisdom, the Wisdom of All Modes 一切種智, can illuminate the Dharma Realm to cross over all living beings.

**Great Brightness Buddha:** His name is also based on wisdom. He obtained the three clairvoyances, heavenly clairvoyance, past lives clairvoyance and ending of outflows clairvoyance, and destroyed the darkness of the five dwellings and afflictions. The Buddha's three clairvoyances enable him to know everything. That is why each Buddha is called the One with Proper and Universal Knowledge 正遍知. They can destroy the darkness of the three delusions.

**Jeweled Appearance Buddha:** His name is based on marks. "Jeweled" conveys a venerated and honored meaning. This Buddha's marks are numerous and very adorned, refined and superior, inspiring living beings to venerate and honor him. Furthermore, his whole body is like fine gold. All of his

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marks are like jeweled appearances. Both his inner and outer marks are both venerated and honored.

**Pure Light Buddha** has incredibly bright lights. His name is based on wisdom. “Pure” means devoid of defilements. “Light” refers to both the body and wisdom light. They both emit light from extreme purity. His wisdom light is perfected, free from defilements and pure, leaving nothing that is not illuminated. His wisdom light can purify all affliction and defilements.

**All Buddhas such as these, numberless as Ganges' sands, each in his own country brings forth a vast and long tongue that covers the three thousand great thousand worlds and proclaims these sincere and true words: “All you living beings should believe in this sutra of which all the Buddhas praise its inconceivable merit and virtue, and of which they are protective and mindful.”** Again all the Buddhas of the ten directions provide certification to this Dharma Door.

*Sutra Text:*

**Shariputra, in the Northern World, Blazing Shoulders Buddha, Most Victorious Sound Buddha, Hard to Injure Buddha, Sun-Birth Buddha, Net Brightness Buddha, all Buddhas such as these, numberless as Ganges' sands, each in his own country brings forth a vast and long tongue that covers the three thousand great thousand worlds and proclaims these sincere and true words: “All you living beings should believe in this sutra which all the Buddhas**

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praise for its inconceivable merit and virtue, and of which they are protective and mindful.”

*Sutra Commentary:*

**Shariputra, in the Northern World, Blazing Shoulders Buddha, Most Victorious Sound Buddha, Hard to Injure Buddha, Sun-Birth Buddha, Net Brightness Buddha...**

**Blazing Shoulders Buddha:** He uses the Two Wisdoms, Mundane and True, to shoulder living beings. This was explained in a prior section.

**Most Victorious Sound Buddha:** His sound cannot be defeated. His sound is beautiful and wonderful, surpassing all other sounds. It is replete with inconceivable power. It cannot be surpassed by any sounds of the nine realms of living beings. This Buddha's three karmas are most superior. Sound refers to the mouth karma. When he speaks Dharma, his single perfect sound can cause living beings of different species to understand. His sound is truly inconceivable, reflecting total self-mastery.

**Hard to Injure Buddha:** His teaching cannot be defamed. He certified to the ultimately durable principles. When the true is total and the delusions are exhausted, one can no longer be injured. His Dharma body is permanently dwelling and cannot be destroyed. All the demons cannot obstruct or cause difficulties at all.

**Sun-Birth Buddha:** He appears in the world and uses his wisdom light which is as bright as the sun to dispel all living

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beings' stupidity and darkness. He uses his wisdom like the sun to vastly propagate the Dharma. Or one could say he uses his wisdom like the sun to produce good dharmas in living beings. The Buddha appears in the world and uses his sun-like wisdom to illuminate and destroy the worldly self and other stupidity and darkness. He is like the bright sun that embellishes the skies: the multitudes' confusion is burned up and destroyed.

**Net Brightness Buddha:** He extends the teaching net to fish out living beings. The Dharma Doors are measureless like the net holes. The teaching principle's brightness can obliterate living beings' stupidity and darkness. He gives us this teaching net to enable living beings to bring forth clarity and understanding. Each teaching net is accomplished by the Buddha's wisdom, is clear and bright, thoroughly penetrating and can obliterate confusion and darkness.

**All Buddhas such as these, numberless as Ganges' sands, each in his own country brings forth a vast and long tongue that covers the three thousand great thousand worlds and proclaims these sincere and true words: "All you living beings should believe in this sutra which all the Buddhas praise for its inconceivable merit and virtue, and of which they are protective and mindful."** Again all the Buddhas of the ten directions provide certification to this Dharma Door.

*Sutra Text:*

**Shariputra, in the World Below, Lion Buddha, Well-Known Buddha, Famous Light Buddha, Dharma Buddha,**

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**Dharma-Banner Buddha, Dharma Maintaining Buddha, all Buddhas such as these, numberless as Ganges' sands, each in his own brings forth a vast and long tongue that covers the three thousand great thousand worlds and proclaims these sincere and true words: “All you living beings should believe in this sutra which all the Buddhas praise for its inconceivable merit and virtue, and of which they are protective and mindful.”**

*Sutra Commentary:*

**Shariputra, in the World Below, Lion Buddha, Well-Known Buddha, Famous Light Buddha, Dharma Buddha, Dharma-Banner Buddha, Dharma Maintaining Buddha...**

The lower direction also has numberless worlds and numberless Buddhas who also praise the Pure Land perfect sudden Dharma Door. The water wheel supports the continents where living beings live. The water wheel relies on the metal wheel. Below the metal wheel, there is the wind wheel. The wind and metal wheels rub with each other creating the fire wheel between them. This Saha world is propped up by the wind wheel. Below it, there is the space wheel. This world has the three realms (samsara). There are layers upon layers of such worlds.

**Lion Buddha:** The lion is the king of the animals. With its roar, it can terrify the hundred animals. Likewise, the Buddha is the Dharma King. When he speaks Dharma, all demons and externalists are frightened out of their wits. The Dharma King speaks Dharma with self-mastery. Of the heavenly demons and externalists who get to hear it, all are subdued and bring forth the faith. The Buddha's self-mastery when speak-

## Small Amitabha Sutra

ing the Dharma is similar to the lions' self-mastery when amongst the beasts.

**Well-Known Buddha** is well-known throughout the Dharma Realm. His name can cause the ten directions to quake. This was explained earlier.

**Famous Light Buddha:** His light of wisdom is well-known. His wisdom light is like that of the sun: it can illuminate everything under heaven, dispel darkness and nurture the 10,000 things, benefiting all living beings. Those who hear of his name or encounter his light will be enlightened.

**Dharma Buddha:** Dharma has the connotation of a “pathway or road”, enabling vehicles to follow and rely upon it. The Buddhadharma is like pathways for living beings to follow to their destination. This Buddha's practice can be the model for us to imitate. In particular, he teaches the three non-outflow studies that living beings can rely upon for practice to reach the other shore. He uses the Buddhadharma as his body. Both conditioned and unconditioned Dharmas can be relied upon.

**Dharma-Banner Buddha:** Banner has a high and conspicuous meaning. When this Buddha speaks Dharma, his teachings far surpass all the others, being clear, evident and ultimate. He established all sorts of Dharmas (Four Noble Truths, Twelve Conditioned Links, Six Paramitas, etc ...) which are superior and well known like high flying banners. The Three Vehicles practitioners, the gods, dragons and eight-fold division, humans and non-humans, etc. all venerate and look up to him.

## Explained by Master YongHua

**Dharma Maintaining Buddha:** He exclusively upholds the Buddhadharma. He upholds the Hinayana, Mahayana, sudden, and secret dharmas to teach living beings according to their capacities. He maintains the past Buddhadharma to transmit to the future generations.

**All Buddhas such as these, numberless as Ganges' sands, each in his own country brings forth a vast and long tongue that covers the three thousand great thousand worlds and proclaims these sincere and true words: “All you living beings should believe in this sutra which all the Buddhas praise for its inconceivable merit and virtue, and of which they are protective and mindful.”** Again, all the Buddhas of the ten directions provide certification to this Dharma Door.

*Sutra Text:*

**Shariputra, in the World Above, Pure Sound Buddha, Constellation King Buddha, Superior Fragrance Buddha, Fragrant Light Buddha, Great Blazing Shoulders Buddha, Varicolored Jewels-Adorned Body Buddha, Sala Tree King Buddha, Jeweled Flower Virtue Buddha, Discerning All Meanings Buddha, Like Sumeru Mountain Buddha, all Buddhas such as these, numberless as Ganges' sands, each in his own brings forth a vast and long tongue that covers the three thousand great thousand worlds and proclaims these sincere and true words: “All you living beings should believe in this sutra which all the Buddhas praise for its inconceivable merit and virtue, and of which they are protective and mindful.”**



## Small Amitabha Sutra

*Sutra Commentary:*

**Shariputra, in the World Above, Pure Sound Buddha, Constellation King Buddha, Superior Fragrance Buddha, Fragrant Light Buddha, Great Blazing Shoulders Buddha, Varicolored Jewels-Adorned Body Buddha, Sala Tree King Buddha, Jeweled Flower Virtue Buddha, Discerning All Meanings Buddha, Like Sumeru Mountain Buddha...** In the upper direction, there are layers upon layers of worlds, just like in the lower direction described earlier. Above this Desire Realm are the six Desire heavens. Above that are the four Dhyanas' eighteen heavens. And above the four Dhyana heavens are the four heavens of emptiness. Above the emptiness heavens is the space wheel. Above the space wheel, is the wind wheel. Above the wind wheel is the fire wheel. Above the fire wheel there is the metal wheel. Above the metal wheel is the water wheel. Above the water wheel there are measureless worlds. Such wheels exist in measureless layers. Therefore the upper direction also has numberless Buddhas and Buddhahands.

*Question:* If all directions have Pure Lands, why praise the Western Buddhahand?

*Answer:* This is not a good question. If we were to praise the Eastern Lands, you'd complain too! You think too much!

*Question:* Why not praise all the Pure Lands in the Dharma Realm?

*Answer:* There are three reasons:

## Explained by Master YongHua

1. To make it easier for the newly initiated to grasp and believe.
2. The Buddha can only cross over those with whom he has conditions. On the causal ground, he perfected his profound and vast virtue. He then brought all sorts of teachings to the worlds that can bring joy to living beings and help them to bring forth the faith. He also can activate the seeds planted in the past, making it hard for the demons' obstructions to impede us, enabling our substance nature to unfold and prosper.
3. The Buddha seeds arise from conditions. Conditions pervade the Dharma Realm. One thought is just all thoughts 一念一切念. One living being is just all living beings 一生一切生. Offering one stick of incense, one flower, one sound, one form, is sufficient for the Buddhas to certify repentances, give predictions and rub the crown of the head. All the Buddhas of the ten directions and three periods of time are of one universal substance. This Western Pure Land was created from conditions which pervade the entire Dharma Realm. There is no need to discriminate.

Those with shallow roots should focus on the Western Dharma. Sharp rooted people have no need to forsake the West and seek the Flower Store 深位人亦不必捨西方而別求華藏. Don't discriminate so much! Don't proclaim that the Western Pure Land is provi-

## Small Amitabha Sutra

sional while the Flower Store is actual, or the Western Land is small and the Flower Store large. It all falls on worldly calculating and discriminating. That would prevent you from attaining the provisional and actual one single substance. This is because big and small have no nature 若謂西方是權，華藏是實，西方小，華藏大者，全墮眾生遍計執情。以不達權實一體，大小無性故也。

*Note:* According to the Flower Adornment Sutra, Flower Store 華藏世界 refers to the world system that Vairochana Buddha created from his Bodhisattva practice. Within this Flower Store World System, there are countless world sub-systems, among which there is one called Lotus Store World 蓮華藏世界 within which our Saha world and the Western Bliss Pure Land are on the thirteenth tier.

**Pure Sound Buddha's** sound is clear and pure. His sound mark is beautiful and wonderful, making listeners become elated. This Buddha's sound is pure, free of defilements. There is no attachment to self, no attachment to Dharma.

**Constellation King Buddha:** Constellation King can be explained as:

1. The moon is the king of the night. All the other constellations, no matter how bright they shine in the sky cannot compare with the moon. Similarly the Buddha is the Dharma King who obtained the great

## Explained by Master YongHua

enlightenment: no other living being can compare with him. The Buddha is the king of the Bodhisattvas, Two Vehicle Sages and ordinary people because he has already obtained self-mastery.

2. The North Star is the king of the night. All the other constellations surround this star out of respect. Similarly, the Buddha is the enlightenment king with whom all the nine realm living beings can take refuge.

**Superior Fragrance Buddha:** This Buddha is complete with the five parts of the Dharma Body fragrance:

1. Precept fragrance
2. Samadhi fragrance
3. Wisdom fragrance
4. Liberation fragrance
5. Liberation knowledge and views fragrance

There is no better fragrance than the precept and virtue fragrance.

The Ox-head Chandana incense is foremost among the different types of incense. It is said that six zhu 銖 (a Chinese measure of about 7.8125 grams) of it is worth all of the Saha world. The Shurangama Sutra says that once this incense is burned, it can be simultaneously smelled throughout 40 lis (averages to about 2,400 miles). Similarly, the Buddha certified to the five part Dharma Body fragrance and can universally permeate 薰 the ten directions in a way that even the Ox-head Chandana incense cannot.

If you light incense, **Fragrant Light Buddha** will emit light. The fragrance spreads very far and the light speaks Dharma.

## Small Amitabha Sutra

He also practiced the Buddha recitation Dharma Door. He used incense and light for adornment and thus attained Buddhahood. In the Shurangama Sutra, the Great Strength Bodhisattva Perfect Penetration Chapter says that to recollect the Buddha or to recite his name is to see the Buddha, for sure, now and in the future. Even the Buddha of the past is not far. Without any expedients, one's mind can naturally open up, and like one who burns incense, his body will be permeated with its fragrance.

Worldly fragrances can only stop filth but cannot destroy darkness. In contrast, the Buddha's precept, samadhi and wisdom fragrance can not only stop and eradicate view and thought filth but can also illuminate stillness and encompass empty space, as well as illuminating and destroying the darkness of ignorance.

As in the Southern Worlds, **Great Blazing Shoulder Buddha** emits light from his shoulders, representing the two kinds of wisdom: provisional and actual.

**Varicolored Jewels-Adorned Body Buddha** adorns the virtues of his fruition with causal flowers of the Six Paramitas and Ten Thousand Practices. The fruition virtues thus adorn the Dharma Body. Hence his name is based on his practice.

The mind flowers blossom and therefore adorn themselves. Or it could be that his body is adorned by the multitudes of varicolored jewels, rendering his body most beautiful and good.

## Explained by Master YongHua

**Sala Tree King Buddha:** The sala tree is found in India. Its name means “solid and durable.” This tree is taller and bigger than any other and does not wither because of old age or cold. This symbolizes the Buddha’s Dharma Body principle substance.

The Buddha certified to the ultimate solid and durable Dharma body substance which surpasses all the other nine realms. Thus he is named as the Dharma King. Like the great tree king which can provide umbrage, the Buddha can also cover over and provide shade to all living beings.

**Jeweled Flower Virtue Buddha:** On the causal ground he cultivated the 10,000 practices (flowers) to adorn the fruition virtue. His causal practices are as honored as the jeweled flowers.

His body, wisdom, merit and virtue are like jewels that are highly prized. This Buddha is replete with the ten thousand virtues. He is most adorned, honored and venerated like jeweled flowers. The flowers of the world can wither, but jeweled flowers are solid and durable, wonderful and good. So too are this Buddha’s virtues.

**Discerning All Meanings Buddha:** His wisdom knows all, sees all. “Meaning” refers to states. The Buddha has the five eyes and can see all the states.

Both worldly dharmas and transcendental dharmas are all inexhaustible. So are the meanings (“states”). This Buddha obtained the Wisdom of All Modes 一切種智 and is replete

## Small Amitabha Sutra

with proper knowledge and views. He can see the ultimate real marks of all dharmas, whether they be provisional or actual, skewed or perfect, sudden or gradual, general or specific—he can see all the meanings. There is nothing that he does not know or see.

**Like Sumeru Mountain Buddha:** As we mentioned earlier, Mount Sumeru is made from the four jewels and is the tallest mountain. This symbolizes the Buddha's four virtues which are as lofty in the world.

*Question:* Why recommend rebirth to the Western Bliss Pure Land and not the other Pure Lands?

*Answer:* There are three reasons:

1. Those with lower roots can have a better chance to bring forth the desire for rebirth and execute the three requisites for the Pure Land Dharma Door. This makes it easier for them to be single-minded.
2. Amitabha used extensive vow power to adorn his land. All Buddhas thus praise him.
3. Amitabha has tremendous affinity with living beings in our world.

In fact, when Buddhas cross over living beings and have difficulty in helping them, whether or not the accomplishment of those beings will be shallow or deep depends on three things:

1. Buddhas cannot cross over those with whom they have no affinity. (If prior conditions are shallow then living beings will not be transformed that easily!)

## Explained by Master YongHua

2. In fact, Amitabha has such deep affinity with living beings because of his vast 48 vows on the causal grounds.
3. Without the Pure Land teaching, living beings would not be able to know what to do to get reborn there.

In the Large Amitabha Sutra, Amitabha tells Maitreya Bodhisattva that there are seven hundred twenty hundred million who have been reborn to the Pure Land. Each one of these has already made offerings to incalculable Buddhas like Maitreya Bodhisattva. As for the other worlds: 1) In Brightness Far Illuminating Buddha's land, eighty hundred million Bodhisattvas have been reborn to the Pure Land. 2) In Jewel Store Buddha's land, ninety hundred million have been reborn. 3) In Measureless Sound Buddha's land, 220 hundred million have. In addition, there are many others from numberless different worlds who were reborn to the Western Bliss Pure Land.

Those with shallow roots can simply recite the Buddha's name to obtain rebirth. Those with superior roots already understand that to recite Amitabha is to recite all the Buddhas' names, and to be reborn to the Western Bliss Pure Land is to be reborn to all Buddhaholds of the ten directions. There is no need to let go of the West, or seek the Flower Store. The Western Bliss Pure Land is not outside of the mind!

**All Buddhas such as these, numberless as Ganges' sands, each in his own country brings forth a vast and long tongue that covers the three thousand great thousand worlds and proclaims these sincere and true words: "All you living beings should believe in this sutra which all the**



## Small Amitabha Sutra

**Buddhas praise for its inconceivable merit and virtue, and of which they are protective and mindful.”** Again all the Buddhas of the ten directions provide certification to this Dharma Door.

All the Buddhas thus praise Amitabha’s merit and virtue. In the Large Amitabha Sutra, Dharma Treasury Bhikshu vows that when he becomes a Buddha, all Buddhas will praise him and his Buddhaland.

*Question:* All the Buddhas praise the Pure Land Dharma Door, why does the Sixth Patriarch say, “People in the eastern direction create offenses, recite the Buddha’s name and seek rebirth to the Western Pure Land. In which land do people in the western direction who create offenses and recite the Buddha’s name seek rebirth 東方人造罪，念佛求生西方；西方人造罪，念佛求生何國?”

*Answer:* This is meant for sharp rooted people in the Chan school and not meant to denigrate the Pure Land Dharma Door. People with dull roots should rely on the Pure Land Dharma Door. In fact, one could say that the Sixth Patriarch was praising the Real Mark Buddha recitation. Real Mark means that neither the Buddha nor the Pure Land exist outside of the mind; everything is part of the true nature. This is consistent with the Pure Land teachings which advocate reciting one’s own nature Amitabha Buddha and also state that the Western Pure Land is not apart from pure mind, etc...

*Sutra Text:*

## Explained by Master YongHua

**Shariputra, what do you think? Why is it called Sutra of which all Buddhas are protective and mindful? Shariputra, if a good man or good woman hears this sutra and upholds it, and hears the names of all these Buddhas, this good man or good woman will also be the one of whom all Buddhas are protective and mindful, and will irreversibly attain to Anuttara-Samyak-Sambodhi. Therefore, Shariputra, all of you should believe and accept my words and those which all Buddhas speak.**

*Sutra Commentary:*

Shakyamuni praised the Buddhas of the six directions, representing all ten directions. The Buddha's name is replete with the unsurpassed perfect and ultimate ten thousand virtues. Shakyamuni then explains the name of the sutra.

**Shariputra, what do you think? Why is it called Sutra of which all Buddhas are protective and mindful? Shariputra, if a good man or good woman hears this sutra and upholds it, and hears the names of all these Buddhas, this good man or good woman will also be the one of whom all Buddhas are protective and mindful, and will irreversibly attain to Anuttara-Samyak-Sambodhi.** If a good person accepts and upholds the sutra, all Buddhas of the ten directions will be mindful and protective of him or her. They will also help him or her irreversibly progress towards Buddhahood. The Large Amitabha Sutra says, "If one has not already cultivated blessings and wisdom in the past, then one cannot hear of this Proper Dharma. We have already venerated and served all Thus Come Ones; that is how we obtained the causes and conditions necessary to hear of this principle

## Small Amitabha Sutra

若不往昔修福慧，於此正法不能聞，已曾欽奉諸如來，故有因緣聞此義。” The Flower Adornment Sutra says: “寧受地獄苦，得聞諸佛名；不願生天中，而不聞佛名。不願生天中，而不聞佛名； I'd rather endure the sufferings of hell in order to hear of the Buddha's name, than be born into the heavens and not hear of the Buddha's name.” To be able to hear of the sutra and uphold it, one must be of superior roots with great causes and conditions and as a result, will obtain all the Buddhas' protection.

To hear the sutra and uphold it is to recite the Buddha's name. Those who recite the Buddha's name therefore also obtain protection from the Buddhas.

The Buddha has three virtues:

1. Prajna virtue: Wisdom and virtue reach the ultimate.
2. Liberation virtue: The severing virtue is ultimate.
3. Dharma Body virtue: The mind nature reaches the ultimate.

*Question:* If we recite the Buddha's name with a scattered mind, can we obtain the three non-regressions?

*Answer:* There are both narrow and broad meanings.

The Investigating Good and Evil Karmic Retributions Sutra states that if you recite Earth Store Bodhisattva's name with a scattered and defiled mind, then it is not considered as being heard. 'Scattered and defiled mind' refers to the mind being

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defiled with view delusions (88 grades) and thought delusions (81 grades). Though the mouth may recite, one cannot obtain literary wisdom. This is because one's samadhi power is inadequate and therefore the wisdom nature cannot manifest. Thus one cannot bring forth the mind of faith and understanding. However, one can still obtain worldly good retributions. But unless one develops some samadhi power, one will not obtain the world transcending non-regressions.

If one obtains the Buddha recitation samadhi, wisdom unfolds and view and thought delusions are destroyed, thus transforming the defiled mind into the pure mind. One can enter the Similar Position 得入相似位, called Obtaining Similar Non-production Patience 得相似無生法忍, or Similar to the Primary Principle 相似第一諦, or Obtaining the Primary Principle Complete Giving 得第一諦悉壇 Entering the Principles Benefit 入理益; one can obtain the equivalent of hearing the names of the Buddhas of the ten directions.

It is imperative for us to recite until reaching the state of “one mind unconfused” and get rid of our view and thought delusions before all Buddhas will be able to become mindful and protective of us. That is the narrow sense.

At a broader level, whether or not one obtains the recitation samadhi, the Buddha's name has inconceivable power and can plant superior seeds to be reborn in the future. In addition, the Buddhas are greatly compassionate and kind; they do not discriminate at all. Just recite and obtain their help: we can access inconceivable power from their names.

## Small Amitabha Sutra

In the Large Sutra, Shakyamuni Buddha told Maitreya, “Out of kindness, compassion and pity for living beings, I will uphold this sutra an extra 100 years after all the other sutras disappear. This sutra and the Large Amitabha Sutra are of the same Pure Land Dharma.”

The Buddhas are mindful of all good men and women who uphold this Sutra because it is the proper cause for rebirth to the Western Bliss Pure Land.

There are three kinds of living beings:

1. Those with deviant samadhi 邪定聚
2. Those with no samadhi 不定聚
3. Those with proper samadhi 正定聚

If we enter proper samadhi then all the Buddhas will be mindful of us 若人入正定聚，則為諸佛護念。

There are three kinds of Buddha nature:

1. Conditioned Cause Buddha Nature 緣因佛性: From hearing of the Buddha’s name, the Buddha seeds are planted in the eighth consciousness. In this life and in future lives we will surely get to see the Buddha and obtain liberation. As the Lotus Sutra states, “Even if a person with a scattered mind enters a stupa or temple and recites ‘Na Mo Buddha’, he has already accomplished the Buddha Way 若人散亂心，入於塔廟中，一稱南無佛，皆已成佛道。”

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2. Understanding Cause Buddha Nature 了因佛性: If there is a good man or woman who hears of this sutra, and accepts, maintains, reads, recites, explains its meaning and practices it, when he reaches the single-mindedness response, that is the Buddha recitation samadhi, then the Pure Land manifests. He will understand that the Pure Land is just the mind. As the Lotus Sutra states, “Of those who get to hear the Dharma, there is none who will not accomplish Buddhahood 若有聞法者，無一不成佛。”
3. Proper Cause Buddha Nature 正因佛性: In the Earth Store Sutra, the Buddha tells Earth Store Bodhisattva, “If a good man or woman who within the Buddhadharma plants a few good roots, whether as much as one hair, one dust mote, one grain of sand or one drop of water, then you should use your Way power to support and protect such a person, enabling him to cultivate the unsurpassed Dharma and not allowing him to regress or get lost 若善男子善女人，於佛法中，種少善根，一毛一塵一沙一滄，汝以道力擁護是人，漸修無上勿令退失。”

The seeds of hearing the Dharma or reciting the Buddha’s name belong to the first two types: conditioned and understanding causes. They assist in making the proper causes manifest and cause us to bring forth the Bodhi mind.

Then the Buddhas will be mindful of us and we will obtain Anuttara-Samyak-Sambodhi.

Any type of these three natures can accomplish Buddhahood.

## Small Amitabha Sutra

To obtain the Buddhas' mindful protection really involves the three types of wisdom:

1. To hear of the Pure Land Dharma is literary wisdom. From hearing one brings forth deep faith: believing that the Buddha recitation Dharma is most wonderful.
2. To accept this Dharma is contemplative wisdom. One accepts and cherishes it in one's heart, abhors defilements and admires purity, and makes the vow to seek rebirth.
3. To maintain it is cultivation wisdom. One maintains the Buddha's name. The pure recitations follow one another until one obtains "one mind unconfused."

Those living beings who can hear of this sutra and the Buddha's name definitely must possess great roots.

**Therefore, Shariputra, all of you should believe and accept my words and those which all Buddhas speak.**

The Buddha says that all living beings **should believe and accept my words**. "My words" refers to the principles contained in the proper text section describing both the proper and dependent retributions and adornments. It particularly exhorts us to seek rebirth thereby reciting the Buddha's name.

**Believe** means not to have any doubt. In other words, do not doubt the principles that were expounded. Rather, bring forth the mind to accept, maintain and not forget them. This applies to everyone, to all living beings. We should all believe Shakyamuni's words as well as all the Buddhas' words. As for those who cannot bring forth the faith, the Large Amitabha Sutra says, "Non-believers come from evil paths. Their remaining catastrophes have not been consumed and

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therefore they are stupid and do not believe. They are not able to obtain liberation yet.”

*Sutra Text:*

**Shariputra, if there are people who have already made the vow, who now make the vow, or who will make the vow, I wish to be born in Amitabha's country, these people, whether born in the past, now being born there, or to be born there in the future, will irreversibly attain to Anuttara-Samyak-Sambodhi. Therefore, Shariputra, all good men and good women who believe should make the vow, I will be born in that country.**

*Sutra Commentary:*

The previous section urges living beings to have faith in the Pure Land Dharma. This section urges us to then make vows.

**Shariputra, if there are people who have already made the vow, who now make the vow, or who will make the vow, I wish to be born in Amitabha's country, these people, whether born in the past, now being born there, or to be born there in the future, will irreversibly attain to Anuttara-Samyak-Sambodhi.**

**Who have already made the vow, who now make the vow, or who will make the vow** reiterates that the vows are actually made. It is clearly the case that without faith one cannot make vows. Similarly, without making the vow there would be no faith. That is why it says that those who have faith should make the vow for rebirth.



## Small Amitabha Sutra

**Wish** denotes hope and **born** refers to the five skandhas.

To make vows is self power. Amitabha's vow to pull us there 接引 is other's power. This Pure Land Dharma is complete with both kinds of power and therefore has a higher success rate. If one makes the vow for rebirth during the three periods of time, one will definitely be reborn there without fail.

We are urged to make vows for rebirth three times in this sutra:

1. The first time we are urged to make vows is in the section that describes adornments of the proper and dependent retributions. Living beings who are reborn all obtain non-retreating. Therefore, we should make a vow for rebirth.
2. The second time occurs in the section stating that reciting the Buddha's name and obtaining the recitation samadhi will enable one, at the end of one's life, to be unconfused and to obtain rebirth.
3. This section is the third time that we are urged to make vows.

*Question:* If living beings of the ten directions make vows and are reborn into the Western Bliss Pure Land, isn't there overcrowding?

*Answer:* Vimalakirti's room is only one zhàng (3 and 1/3 meters) in size and can accommodate 32,000 lion seats, so how can Amitabha's vow be limited? The Western Bliss Pure

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Land is just like the vast ocean, it can receive all streams and rivers.

At this point, it is helpful to revisit the three requisites for the Pure Land Dharma Door: faith, vows and practice. Faith leads to making vows. And without vows, one cannot be reborn. These two work hand in hand. Vows are the ticket for faith, enabling us to benefit from our belief. In other words, to have faith and make vows is like having the ticket in hand, enabling us to get to the promised land. Furthermore, the vow is like the hinge of the door of practice, enabling the door to stand securely. To make a vow contains both faith and practice. All three are one and each one is not separate from all three.

Vows involve the two aspects of admiring the Western Bliss Pure Land's bliss and detesting the Saha world's suffering. These two Dharma Doors are replete with the four great vows. *Detesting* the Saha world because it is full of so much suffering, based on the Truth of Suffering, motivates us to bring forth the vow to rescue the measureless living beings. In the Saha world, afflictions have a way of easily piling up. Therefore, based on the Truth of Accumulation, we make the vow to sever the endless afflictions. And because we admire the Western Bliss Pure Land and seek to be reborn there, when the Way aiding conditions are sufficient, we will be able to hear Dharmas teaching us how to attain the Way. We will make vows based on the Truth of the Way to study the countless Dharma Doors. Finally, admiring that all the living beings in the Western Bliss Pure Land will obtain the three non-retreatings and certify to the Unsurpassed Bodhi, based on the Truth of Extinction, we make a vow to attain the Way.

## Small Amitabha Sutra

**Anuttara-Samyak-Sambodhi** is Sanskrit for Unsurpassed Proper Equal Proper Enlightenment. It is among the terms that are not translated due to: 1) having secret meanings, like mantras; 2) being venerated, like Prajna; 3) having multiple meanings, like bhikshu; 4) referring to things that do not exist in our world, like Jambudana 閻浮檀; and finally; 5) according with ancient usage, like this word. The term can be explained from the bottom up. “Sambodhi” is Proper Enlightenment, which is to surpass the six destinies, and not give rise to deviant enlightenment. “Samyak” means Proper and Equal, meaning to surpass the Two Vehicles, who are not equal because they seek self benefit and do not benefit others. Also, the Two Vehicles lean toward the biased Truth and do not want to wade into the mundane to benefit living beings. Thus, for the Two Vehicles, true and mundane are not equal. “Anuttara” means Unsurpassed. It surpasses the Bodhisattvas’ Equal Enlightenment.

*Question:* We can recite Amitabha’s name to obtain irreversibility. Are there any other expedients?

*Answer:* It is not only through reciting, praising and bowing that we obtain irreversibility. We should also sincerely repent in front of the Buddhas, request that they stay in the world, rejoice in other’s merit and virtue, make transferences and make vows. We should practice all of the ten inexhaustible conducts of Universal Worthy Bodhisattva. Thanks to repentance, fixed retributions can be turned. It is like with the as-you-wish pearl—one can obtain irreversibility through making a wish. Furthermore, thanks to the Buddha’s mindful

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protection, we can obtain irreversibility toward Anuttara-Samyak-Sambodhi.

**Therefore, Shariputra, all good men and good women who believe should make the vow, I will be born in that country.** Wait no further, make the vow for rebirth now.

*Question:* “Will” make the vow makes sense but why mention “now”?

*Answer:* “Now” has two meanings:

1. To make a vow this lifetime will result in being reborn this lifetime.
2. There are ninety ksanas in each thought. At that level, each recitation is the cause for rebirth, therefore recitation after recitation continually plants the seeds for rebirth, the more vigorously we recite the Buddha’s name, the bigger and brighter our lotus flower grows in the lotus pool of the Western Bliss Pure Land; the more lax we are in our recitation, the quicker our lotus flower shrivels up. This inconceivable response is not separate from our mind.

In terms of responses, we can bring up a few.

Great Master Ke 可 (can) Jiu 久 (long time) often recited the Lotus Flower Sutra. He entered samadhi for three days. He came back and told his followers that he went to the Western Bliss Pure Land and saw that it is as described in the sutras.

## Small Amitabha Sutra

It is not unusual for some devoted Pure Land practitioners to pass away and have their room filled with bright lights and fragrance.

There was a queen in Vietnam who believed in the Pure Land Dharma and lead her retinue in its practice. One of her attendants passed away without any illness. That night the queen dreamt of the attendant coming back to thank her for teaching her the Pure Land Dharma Door because she had obtained rebirth already. She described the Western Bliss Pure Land as it is in the sutra and urged the queen to practice more vigorously. The queen asked, “Can I also obtain rebirth?” The attendant replied that she already saw the lotus flower for the queen and that she will definitely be reborn with an upper grade. Later, on the queen’s next birthday, she saw GuanYin and stood up to greet her. Her retinue later came to wish her happy birthday and found that she had died while standing up.

Making the vow for rebirth will allow for rebirth. That creates the pull that will take us there. This a true asset that we can certainly count on at our final critical juncture. The Universal Worthy Bodhisattva’s Practice and Vows Chapter says, “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. Arriving there, he will see Amita Buddha, Manjushri Bodhisattva, Universal Worthy

## Explained by Master YongHua

Bodhisattva, the Bodhisattva Who Contemplates At Ease, Maitreya Bodhisattva, and others. The appearances of these Bodhisattvas will be upright and adorned, and their merit and virtue complete. The Buddha will then give a prediction.

是人臨命終時，最后剎那，一切諸根悉皆散壞，一切親屬，悉皆捨離，一切威勢，悉皆退失，輔相大臣，宮城內外，象馬車乘，珍寶伏藏，如是一切，無復相隨，惟此願王不相捨離，於一切時引導其前，一剎那中，即得往生西方極樂世界，到已即見阿彌陀佛，文殊師利菩薩，普賢菩薩，觀自在菩薩，彌勒菩薩等自見生蓮華中，蒙佛授記。”

### ***Buddhas praised this rare merits to make one understand Buddha's kindness***

*Sutra Text:*

Shariputra, just as I now praise the inconceivable merit and virtue of all Buddhas, all those Buddhas also praise my inconceivable merit and virtue, saying these words: Shakyamuni Buddha can accomplish extremely difficult and rare deeds in the Saha world during the evil time of the Five Turbidities: during the kalpa turbidity, the view turbidity, the affliction turbidity, the living beings turbidity, and the lifespan turbidity. He can attain Anuttara-Samyak-Sambodhi and for the sake of living beings pro-

## Small Amitabha Sutra

**claim this Dharma, which the whole world finds hard to believe.**

*Sutra Commentary:*

**Shariputra, just as I now praise the inconceivable merit and virtue of all Buddhas, all those Buddhas also praise my inconceivable merit and virtue, saying these words:**

Shakyamuni Buddha, by praising Amitabha, is therefore praising all Buddhas. They praise him in return by stating that he can accomplish difficult deeds. Shakyamuni Buddha can do what others cannot. In particular, he can proclaim the Pure Land Dharma in the time of the Five Turbidities.

There are ten pairs of ease and difficulty:

1. In the Pure Land we often get to see the Buddha, therefore practice is easy. In the Turbid world we do not encounter the Buddha that often, therefore practice is difficult.
2. In the Pure Land we often hear the Dharma, making it easy to cultivate. In the Turbid world this is not the case, therefore it is difficult.
3. In the Pure Land superior and good people assemble, therefore it is easy. In the Turbid world evil friends lead and pull us, thus making it difficult.
4. In the Pure Land there are no demonic obstructions therefore it is easy. In the Turbid world the multitude of demons harass us, therefore it is difficult.
5. In the Pure Land we do not have to undergo reincarnation, therefore it is easier. In the Turbid world: we have the difficulties of incessantly revolving in the wheel.

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6. In the Pure Land it is easier because the three evil paths do not exist. The Turbid world is more difficult because it is easy to fall into the evil destinies.
7. In the Pure Land it is easier to cultivate because of superior Way aiding conditions. In the Turbid world it is harder because of defiled conditions (e.g. birth) and karmic obstructions.
8. In the Pure Land it is easier because the lifespan is measureless. In the Turbid world it is more difficult because the lifespan is much shorter.
9. In the Pure Land it is easier because we certify to non-retreating. In the Turbid world it is harder because most cultivators retreat.
10. In the Pure Land we will surely attain Buddhahood in one lifetime thereby making it easy. In the Turbid world it is very difficult to attain Bodhi even after many many kalpas.

Living beings in the Saha world have to endure a lot of suffering and yet often are unaware of their suffering. They conveniently tend to forget about it.

It is much harder to explain the Pure Land Dharma to living beings in the turbid world than in the Pure Land because they have dull roots. Or perhaps, their karmic obstructions are particularly heavy and they have a hard time bringing themselves to execute the three requisites for rebirth. Furthermore, it is not easy to explain the sudden Dharma to them. It is much easier to explain to them the gradual teaching: the Five Precepts, Ten Good Deeds, Four Noble Truths, Twelve Conditioned Links, etc... Furthermore, the 49-day Dharma is just too good to be true! This is like trying to explain colors to the blind. For our Buddha to speak this Dharma really shows his



## Small Amitabha Sutra

inconceivable merit and virtue in attempting to help benefit living beings.

**Shakyamuni Buddha can accomplish extremely difficult and rare deeds in the Saha world during the evil time of the Five Turbidities: during the kalpa turbidity, the view turbidity, the affliction turbidity, the living beings turbidity, and the lifespan turbidity. Only Shakyamuni Buddha can do it.**

**Shakyamuni:** Shakya is Sanskrit for “capable and humane.” Muni is Sanskrit for “still and silent.” His name is based on compassion and wisdom, the two virtues. Capable relies on the humaneness virtue to utilize expedients to help and benefit living beings. That is compassion virtue. Stillness can illuminate and encompass empty space, at ease and unmoving. Silent indicates an absence of words and yet accords with the principles. That is wisdom virtue.

**Can accomplish extremely difficult and rare deeds.** He can endure the difficulties in teaching and transforming living beings. In fact, the World Honored One crossed over countless living beings, and gave many predictions for Buddhahood. That is why the Buddhas of the ten directions praise Shakyamuni Buddha.

**Saha world:** Saha is Sanskrit for “able to endure.” In other words, to be able to endure and accept suffering and vexations.

From the Buddha’s perspective, it refers to his vast and great kindness and compassion. He can patiently endure the multi-

## Explained by Master YongHua

tudes of difficulties of crossing over living beings of this world. From the living beings' perspective, it refers to their heavy and profound stupidity and ability to bear and endure this land's eight kinds of suffering and not seek to escape or put an end to it.

**Evil time of the Five Turbidities** can be explained in five aspects.

**Turbidities** can be likened to quick sand: it is very difficult to extricate oneself from it. The Shurangama Sutra says it's like water which originally is clear and pure. Then sand and dirt are tossed into the water. The result is that the dirt loses its obstructedness while water loses its clarity. That is turbidity. Its presence makes it very difficult to discern or see clearly. During this time of turbidity, the three small calamities, fire, water and wind, gradually arise, afflictions become more severe, living beings lean towards evil, defiled views gradually increase, and the lifespan shortens. On the whole, everything gradually deteriorates, becomes evil and abhorrent.

Altogether, there are **five turbidities**:

1. **The kalpa turbidity** refers to turbid times. The kalpa turbidity arises dependent on the other four turbidities, taking the growth of the other four as its basic substance. Originally, there were no turbidities, they merely happen to arise at this time. The kalpa turbidity also takes unceasing flame as its mark. Like flaming firewood, the more it burns the higher it blazes. Shakyamuni realized Buddhahood in this time. So he knows how difficult it is to do so. He therefore decid-

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ed to speak of this Dharma without request because it's one of the most important Dharmas for our time. In the Decreasing Kalpa, the time of the kalpa turbidity occurs when the average lifespan reaches 20,000 years. When the lifespan reaches 100 years, that is called the Five Turbidities Evil Time. This is when Shakyamuni Buddha appeared in the world. He taught this Pure Land Dharma to help us horizontally escape. Without the Pure Land Dharma, living beings will have a hard time obtaining liberation.

More specifically, the kalpa turbidity takes the five view delusions as substance and nature. During this time, many prefer to draw near the externalists. Evil views proliferate. There will be times of hunger, epidemics and wars which could happen concurrently.

2. **The view turbidity** takes the five quick servants as its basic substance. The five quick servants are: 1) Body views 身: we deeply love and attach to the body, not realizing that the body is just the four elements falsely united. It is false, like a mirage and is impermanent. 2) Extreme views 邊: we believe in nihilism or permanence, which are the two extreme views, instead of the Middle Way. 3) View grasping views 見取: we take what is not a retribution as a retribution, such as in the case of the Unlearned Bhikshu. 4) Precept grasping views 戒取: we take what is not a cause to be a cause, such as those who cultivate the unbeneficial ascetic practices. And finally, 5) Deviant views

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邪: we do not believe in cause and effect. These five belong to the view delusions and are called servants because they can make living beings create offenses and thus undergo retributions, drawing them into the flow of birth and death. View delusions take mistaken wisdom and cattle morality (i.e. all the views that arise in confusion 諸見紛起) as its mark. With deviant knowledge and views, people take the genuine doctrine to extremes. In contrast, all the living beings of the Western Bliss Pure Land have proper views.

More specifically, living beings' views are not proper. Deviants views are rampant. When the Buddha was in the world, there were 96 types of deviant views from the externalists. Nowadays, deviant religions and deviant teachers abound. That is why it is called view turbidity.

3. **The affliction turbidity** takes the five dull servants as its basic substance. The five dull servants are: 1) Greed: attaching to pleasant states, we do not realize that all conditioned dharmas are like a dream or mirage. 2) Hatred: toward unfavorable states, we give rise to hatred and anger, grow impatient and do not realize that one thought of hatred opens the door to the eighty thousand obstructions. 3) Stupidity: toward neutral states we give rise to stupid thoughts, failing to understand and analyze that all dharmas are impermanent, and ultimately empty. 4) Arrogance: toward living beings, we cannot be humble, and we do not understand that all living beings are basically equally en-

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dowed with the Buddha nature. And finally, 5) Doubt: toward the Dharma, we harbor doubts and do not understand that one ought to draw near what is good, and that one ought to proceed on the Way. These five servants belong to the thought delusions. The affliction turbidity takes the irritation of afflictions, which makes one upside down and feeling oppressed, as its mark. In contrast, the living beings of the Western Bliss Pure Land are free from afflictions.

During this turbidity, living beings are increasingly greedy for deviant dharmas, use swords and weapons to fight, and continually file lawsuits against one another. They use flattery and lies to transmit deviant dharmas not to mention the rest of the unwholesome dharmas. Living beings endure all sorts of afflictions other than the five views.

4. **The living being turbidity** takes the combination of the three conditions of father, mother and one's own karma as its basic substance. It takes the unceasing turning in the wheel as its mark. Here "form" 色 and mind 心 陋 can be characterized as "ugly" 劣 and "inferior". The five skandhas unite to form living beings. The skandhas are: 1) Form, which has solidity and the connotation of impeding. 2) Feeling, which has the connotation of being receptive (to the five dusts). 3) Thought, which has the connotation of grasping at marks. This skandha corresponds to the sixth consciousness that processes, calculates, and thinks about the dharmas. 4) Formation, which has the

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meaning of flowing. This corresponds to the seventh consciousness that constantly evaluates and discriminates, thought after thought, unceasingly like the constant flow of the white water rapids. And finally, 5) Consciousness, which has the meaning of sustaining. This corresponds to the eighth consciousness that contains the three elements of breath, warmth and life. Though living beings are a union of the five skandhas, the skandhas nonetheless cover up their true nature. In contrast, living beings of the Western Bliss Pure Land are born from transformation. They are pure and adorned.

Today, people do not respect their parents, left-home people or their ancestors. They do not cultivate according to reason and the principles. They are not afraid of the evil retributions of future lives. They do not cultivate generosity and do not practice giving. They do not create merit and virtue. They do not cultivate the vegetarian Dharma. They do not observe the pure precepts. They draw near evil external conditions, do evil and do no good. That is why this period is called the living being turbidity.

More specifically, during this time living beings arise from the aid of evil external conditions, from the five skandhas falsely uniting, and from creating offenses and failing to do good. The Lotus Sutra says that during this time, the ten directions are constantly dark and obscure, the three evil destinies expand, the asuras proliferate, the heavenly realm diminishes, most of those who die fall to the evil paths, and body strength and

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wisdom decrease because of offense retribution causes and conditions. Living beings lose bliss as well as thoughts of bliss. Utterly confused, they bob in the sea of birth and death.

5. **The life turbidity** takes the reception of warmth as its basic substance and the decline and extinction of the lifespan as its mark. Both cause and effect are inferior. Cause refers to the view and thought turbidities. View and thought delusions are the causes for the feeling retribution. Effect refers to the living beings turbidities, to the coarse and miserable five skandhas which are the effect for birth. As a retribution for the killing karmas, the average lifespan will not exceed 100 years. In contrast, living beings in the Western Bliss Pure Land have a measureless lifespan, equal to that of Amitabha's!

More specifically, in our modern era, the lifespan is rather short, rarely exceeding 100 years, due to suicide, abortion, malnutrition, poverty, hunger, epidemics, etc. which cause premature deaths.

**He can attain Anuttara-Samyak-Sambodhi and for the sake of living beings proclaim this Dharma, which the whole world finds hard to believe.** Shakyamuni Buddha accomplished his cultivation in the midst of these most difficult times. He then compassionately expounded this Pure Land Dharma, which is most difficult to believe in.

**The whole world:** including the nine realms. Only the Buddhas will be able to fully understand this Dharma Door.

## Explained by Master YongHua

There are ten things that the world finds **hard to believe**:

1. We have been accustomed to this impure land and our minds have no qualms about enduring its hardships. When, all of a sudden, we hear of the Pure Land Dharma describing a land of such adornments and purity, we cannot help but find it hard to believe.
2. Even if one has no doubt about the Western Pure Land, it is not uncommon to believe that one could seek rebirth to any of the Pure Lands of the ten directions instead of seeking rebirth to the West only.
3. Even if one believes that one will obtain rebirth in the future, this Saha world is ten billion worlds apart from the Land of Utmost Bliss. Hence one cannot help but wonder whether or not rebirth is possible to such a far away land.
4. Even if one believes that the Western Land is not far, one cannot help but doubt that ordinary people who have such heavy offenses and numerous obstructions can manage to obtain rebirth to such a land.
5. Even if one believes that one can obtain rebirth there, one may still doubt whether merely reciting the Buddha's name alone will be enough to ensure rebirth. There must be other extraordinary and wonderful Dharma Doors!
6. Even if one does not have any of the above objections, still one must surely hold the Buddha's name for a very long time! How can holding his name for one day or up to seven days be enough for rebirth?
7. Even if one can obtain rebirth after seven days of recitation, birth in most realms are of the four forms: from womb, egg, moisture or transformation. So how come



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in the West, there is only birth by transformation on a lotus flower?

8. Even if we believe in birth by transformation on a lotus flower, for most people who initially enter the Way, the majority of them will retreat. How can one be born to the West and then magically obtain irreversibility?
9. Even if irreversibility is possible, one cannot help but doubt that dull rooted people would receive rebirth help or whether sharp rooted people would seek rebirth there at all.
10. Even if one is free of the above doubts, one can also have doubts pertaining to what the other sutras say about the Buddha's existence or non-existence, the Pure Land's existence or non-existence. One is suspicious and cannot decide on what to believe.

*Question:* Why does Shakyamuni Buddha appear in world when the average lifespan is 100 years while Maitreya will appear when it's 80,000 years?

*Answer:* They have different vows and therefore appear in the world at different times. The issue is why worry about a long life? The Buddhas live long enough to do what they must do. Then they leave so that they are no longer in the way.

Did you know that Shakaymuni Buddha had to spend 49 years of his life doing his work whereas Maitreya will only teach one day and night and then he will be done?

*Sutra Text:*

## Explained by Master YongHua

**Shariputra, you should know that I, in the evil time of the Five Turbidities, perform these difficult deeds, attain Anuttara-Samyak-Sambodhi, and for the entire world proclaim this Dharma which is difficult to believe, extremely difficult!**

*Sutra Commentary:*

**Shariputra, you should know that I, in the evil time of the Five Turbidities, perform these difficult deeds, attain Anuttara-Samyak-Sambodhi, and for the entire world proclaim this Dharma which is difficult to believe, extremely difficult!** To attain Supreme enlightenment in the midst of the five turbidities is indeed rare and extremely difficult.

The verse of penetrating the Dharma and awakening to the Way in the Sixth Patriarch Sutra 法達悟道偈 says:

*“Who realizes that within the house on fire the Dharma King can be found 誰知火宅內，元是法中王!*

*Recite earnestly during the three periods of time 三時繫念 曰：*

*Who realizes that within the ten myriad six dusts, there is a lotus bud whose blossom brings the proper light onto the world 誰知萬丈紅塵裡，菡萏華開月正明。”*

Shakyamuni also compassionately preached this Pure Land Dharma which is most difficult to believe, that by simply reciting the Buddha’s name, one can obtain such inconceivable

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benefits. Furthermore, to be able to proclaim this Dharma is itself a most difficult task!

Therefore, to be able to hear of this Dharma is most rare and difficult. During the view turbidity, we are definitely bound by deviant views and confused by deviant teachers. During the affliction turbidity, we are invariably trapped by greed and desire and needled by evil offenses. During the living being turbidity, we are lulled into complacency with defilements and filth, we cannot thoroughly awaken, and we are resigned to our own weakness and frailty, unable to spring and soar. During the lifespan turbidity, we simply give up and surrender to the flames and lightning of impermanence which swallow us up.

In the face of all these obstacles, we can see why the opportunity to practice the Pure Land Dharma Door is so valuable! In the turbid worlds, bringing forth the resolve to cultivate is not easy. How much more difficult it is to accomplish the Way. To attain the smaller fruitions may be feasible. But to attain the Buddha fruition is certainly not easy at all.

Last but not least, we are at the transmission section. Transmission comes from the Chinese *liu tong* 流通. *Liu* 流 is 流傳萬古, which means to flow and transmit to the end of time, denoting the time aspect. While *tong* 通 is 通達十方, which means penetrating the ten directions, denoting the space aspect. Therefore, transmission means that it is true everywhere as well as at all times.

## TRANSMISSION

*Sutra Text:*

**After the Buddha spoke this Sutra, Shariputra, all the bhikshus, and all the gods, humans, asuras, and others from all the worlds, hearing what the Buddha had said, obtained great delight, faithfully accepted it, bowed and withdrew.**

*Sutra Commentary:*

**After the Buddha spoke this Sutra, Shariputra, all the bhikshus, and all the gods, humans, asuras, and others from all the worlds, hearing what the Buddha had said, obtained great delight, faithfully accepted it, bowed and withdrew.**

**Spoke this Sutra:** Again, this Dharma Door is most inconceivable, difficult to believe and difficult to understand. No one had enough wisdom to even request it. Shakyamuni Buddha used his wisdom to illuminate the potential of living beings. Seeing that their good roots were maturing, he decided to speak of it without being requested.

**From all the worlds** refers to the insentient worlds that can be destroyed and are subject to decay.

**The gods** referred to are those of the Triple Realm.

**Humans** in the Saha world are particularly able to endure.

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**Asuras** are non-gods; they have heavenly blessings but lack heavenly virtue.

All the Arhats, bhikshus, eight-fold division beings and those from the other worlds **obtained great delight** from listening to the sutra. Delight comes from the Chinese *hoan xi* 歡喜. *Hoan* 歡 refers to a happy facial expression while *xi* 喜 refers to a happy mental attitude. This truly inconceivable Dharma Door can allow for a horizontal escape from samsara, enabling living beings to quickly certify to the true and permanent. Those who are able to hear it are naturally ecstatic. Just as, when those who have been suffering of cold and hunger hear of warmth and abundance, and when those who have been groping in dark and obscure places know of a way to get to light and brightness, they naturally feel elated, jump with joy and obtain what they never had before. So too are those who have been immersed in defilements ecstatic upon hearing of the Pure Land.

The Buddha is replete with five kinds of words:

1. True 真語: His words reflect the true marks.
2. Actual 實語: He tells it like it is, and does not add or subtract anything.
3. Such 如語: His words are in accord with the principles.
4. Not false 不誑語: He does not tell lies.

## Explained by Master YongHua

5. Not different 不異語: He would never utter strange words, say things that would weaken us or dampen our spirits, or things to frighten or shake us.

Therefore we can believe his words.

They **faithfully accepted it** and brought forth great faith in these teachings that have been certified by the Buddhas of the ten directions as well. “Faith” means not have the slightest bit of doubt. “Accept” means to internalize and not forget the Buddha’s name.

They **bowed** to Shakyamuni Buddha in gratitude. To bow is a rather special Buddhist way of expressing gratitude. The Chinese do three and a half bows expressing appreciation for the great kindness of the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas and to offer one’s body as a vehicle for taking refuge with the Triple Jewel.

Finally, they **withdrew** and put the Buddha’s instructions into execution without fail. After hearing the teachings, the next step is to put them into practice.

*Question:* The sutra starts by enumerating the great virtuous ones such the Arhats and Bodhisattvas. Why does it end without mentioning the Bodhisattvas?

*Answer:* Bodhisattvas certainly are the last ones to be ungrateful and fail to appreciate the Buddha’s kindness. This fact can be taken for granted and therefore can be omitted.

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The sutras say that in the Dharma ending age, if one hundred million one hundred million people cultivate, maybe one will obtain the Way. However, those who rely on reciting the Buddha's name will surely be crossed over 末法億億人修行，罕一得道，唯依念佛得度. The Pure Land Dharma Door is most suitable for our times. Faithfully cultivate in earnest, obtain rebirth to the Pure Land, unfold your wisdom, and then come back to the Saha world to save living beings.

A Vietnamese nun disciple decided to bow to me as her teacher. One day she asked for my permission to observe the funeral services for her just deceased Vietnamese Acharya (teacher). My disciple was clearly very emotional and told me that she owed her training to her former teacher. She also told me that she wanted her teacher to return to the human realm to continue her work instead of asking me to try to send her teacher to the Western Bliss Pure Land with our 49-day Dharma. I was mum because she did not ask me for my opinion. A couple of weeks later, during a staff meeting I happened to mention that her teacher was destined to return to the human realm but that this was not such a good idea because her manner of death would indicate that she did not know how to cultivate. In other words, coming back to the human realm is rather risky because she has no really good Dharma to practice. I said that if it were up to me, I'd prefer to go to the Pure Land where it is much more conducive for cultivation. My nun disciple then confessed that for quite a while, every time she had her daily sitting meditation session, she kept seeing her teacher coming at her with a rather angry expression. Furthermore, her Dharma sister in Vietnam also re-

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lated to her that she also saw their teacher in an unhappy state. I explained to my disciple that her teacher was asking for help. I scolded her and told her how ignorant she was. Who was she to decide where her teacher should go next? It would be much better to provide her teacher with a choice. In other words, her teacher had been upset that my disciple did not request for my help so that her teacher could have a choice between going to the Western Pure Land or another realm. My disciple immediately understood, knelt down and asked me to execute our 49-day Dharma to provide assistance to her teacher. I agreed. Two weeks later, her teacher was reborn to the Utmost Bliss Pure Land and no longer bothered her during her meditation sits. She later reported to me that during that same time period in Vietnam where the great assembly was gathered for her funeral services, everyone saw a bright light that traveled from the Buddha Hall into the sky.

The moral of the story is this: unless you can be enlightened this lifetime, it's much better to go for rebirth to the Pure Land to cultivate. Do not come back to the defiled lands until you are no longer confused and can really help others.

*End of the Sutra of the Buddha's Teaching on Amitabha*



**Small Amitabha Sutra**

**Dharani For Rooting Out Karmic Obstructions  
and For Being Reborn In the Pure Land:**

*Na mo e mi duo po ye  
Duo tuo qie duo ye  
Duo di ye tuo  
E mi li du po pi  
E mi li duo xi dan po pi  
E mi li duo pi jia lan di  
E mi li duo pi jia lan duo  
Qie mi li qie qie nuo  
Zhi duo jia li  
Suo po he. (3X)*

Explained by Master YongHua



The three Sages of the West

## Small Amitabha Sutra



**Explained by Master YongHua**

## **Master YongHua's Biography**

A native of Vietnam, Master YongHua came to the US for college where he earned a BS and an MBA with the aspiration of eventually returning to Vietnam to help rebuild his war-ravaged country. However, after climbing up the corporate ladder and reaching executive management positions, he found himself disillusioned with the business world. Around this time, he was exposed to Great Master XuanHua's teachings, which inspired him to enter monastic training. He soon realized that he had discovered his true calling, and decided to dedicate the rest of his life to serving Buddhism.

Master YongHua not only studied meditation in the Gui Yang Lineage of Great Master Xuan Hua, but also inherited the Lin Ji lineage from Master Man Giac. Now that he has investigated Mahayana for over 20 years, Dharma Master YongHua continues the Buddhist tradition of “repaying his teachers’ kindness” by extensively speaking on the Buddhadharma and vigorously training the next generation of cultivators. In the past several years, many of Master YongHua’s students have become accomplished meditators.

Master YongHua advocates the joint practice of Chan and Pure Land. This way those who have the potential can obtain immediate liberation through Chan. Furthermore, at the end of this lifetime, all those who truly believe will have the chance for rebirth to the Pure Land. He offers a practical, contemporary explanation of the Buddha’s ancient teachings in order to help us penetrate the sages' wisdom and apply it to our daily lives, hoping that all living beings will quickly escape suffering and attain bliss.