

Collection on the Land of Peace and Joy

*Composed by Master Daochuo from Xuanzhong Monastery, Bingzhou,
of the Tang Dynasty*

English translation by Householder Foqing,
edited by Householder Jingtu



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41, Alley 22, Lane 150, Sec 5, Shin-Yi Road, Taipei 110049, Taiwan
Tel: 886-2-87894818
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Preface to *Collection on the Land of Peace and Joy*

By Dharma Master Huijing

The *Collection on the Land of Peace and Joy*, comprising two fascicles, was composed by Master Daochuo (562-645). It is included in Volume 47 of the Taisho Canon.

This two-fascicle text is organized into twelve chapters, with the first fascicle containing three chapters and the second, nine. Each chapter is divided into several sections. Chapter 1 includes the maximum, nine sections, while Chapter 12 has just one. In total, there are thirty-eight sections.

As its title *Collection on the Land of Peace and Joy* suggests, the work (hereafter referred to as “*Collection*”) is a compilation that cites sutras, vinayas, abhidharma shastras, commentaries and interpretations, aiming to inspire “the pursuit of rebirth in the Pure Land of Peace and Joy in the West.” It begins thus:

In this “Collection on the Land of Peace and Joy,” there are twelve chapters, each citing sutras and treatises as evidence to encourage the development of faith and the aspiration for rebirth in the Pure Land.

The cited scriptures total more than fifty.

“Peace and Joy” in the title clearly and concisely underscores the purpose of this *Collection*, which is to elucidate the doctrinal principles of the Pure Land of Peace and Joy and to promote rebirth in that land.

The term “Pure Land” stands in contrast to “defiled realm.” As described in the *Amitabha Sutra*, the place where we sentient beings reside is known as an **“iniquitous world of the Five Turbidities,”** where both our physical and mental states, along with our environment, are laden with various forms of impurities. This realm is characterized by its turbidity and malevolence.

In his *Commentary on the Treatise on Rebirth in the Pure Land*, Master Tanluan states:

Ordinary beings undertake wholesome actions of the human/celestial attribute and receive human/celestial karmic rewards. Both the causes and consequences are delusory and false. Such merit is therefore called “untrue merit.”

He continues:

The Three Domains are characterized by illusion, transmigration [in the Six Realms] and endlessness [of suffering]. Like a caterpillar looping itself or a silkworm enmeshed in its own cocoon, sentient beings are pitiful indeed! They are entangled in the Three Domains, deluded and defiled.

He further affirms:

These Three Domains resemble a dark house in which unenlightened ordinary beings reincarnate endlessly. The pleasures of living things are just slightly different from their sufferings. Their lifespans vary in length but only for the time being. Overall, nothing here is not flawed. [Disasters and blessings] coexist, depend on one another and alternate in succession without end. Beings are mired in various states of existence and undergo mixed sensations and feelings. They cling incessantly to the Four Inverted Beliefs. From causes through consequences, delusion and futility persist unceasingly.

That is why our present world is called a “defiled realm.”

The “Pure Land of Peace and Joy” refers to the Western Land of Bliss accomplished by Amitabha Buddha with his merit and virtue. It is pure, immaculate, brimming with light and joy.

According to the *Infinite Life Sutra* and *Amitabha Sutra*, those reborn in the Pure Land **“have excellent and brilliant wisdom and thorough, penetrating supernatural powers. They are all endowed with natural, immaterial bodies and unlimited forms.”** **“That Buddha’s lifespan, as well as those of the people in his land, are innumerable, boundless asamkhyeya-kalpas.”** This suggests that, once reborn in the Pure Land, we will attain eternal life free from the cycle of birth and death, akin to Amitabha Buddha. We will enjoy unhindered bodies and minds to our satisfaction, and all our aspirations and expectations will be fulfilled.

In the Pure Land, the ground is made of gold, and the railings, nets and trees are crafted from myriad treasures. Seven-jeweled ponds, filled with Water of Eight Meritorious Virtues, are scattered throughout. Pavilions, also adorned with sundry treasures, can adjust in size, number, movement and distance according to our wishes.

During the six periods of each day and night, heavenly *mandarava* blossoms rain down from the sky. Amazing birds of diverse colors constantly chant Dharma sounds. When gentle breezes waft through the jeweled trees and jeweled nets, they too emit wondrous Dharma sounds. Hearing these sounds purifies the Six Sense Faculties and leads to the attainment of the Endurance for the Non-Arising of Dharmas.

The *Amitabha Sutra* states:

The sentient beings in that realm are free from all suffering and experience only manifold joys. That is why it is called Bliss.

The *Infinite Life Sutra* proclaims:

Names of the suffering in the Three Wretched Realms do not exist. There are only tones of spontaneous happiness. That is why the Land is called "Peace and Joy."

The *Commentary on the Treatise on Rebirth in the Pure Land* affirms:

This purity is neither corruptible nor contaminable. It contrasts with the Three Domains, which are subject to defilement and destruction.

It further says:

The Land of Peace and Joy arose from the compassion and correct contemplation of Bodhisattva [Dharmakara]. It was established by the supernatural power and original vows of [Amitabha] Tathagata. Because of this Land, [living beings] can bid farewell forever to births by womb, egg and dampness; the long tether of [their] karmic bondage is eternally severed. Consider [an archer with] the skill of shooting arrows in continuous alignment – [he] needn't wait to be reminded to string his bow. Likewise, [those reborn in the Pure Land] spontaneously cultivate diligence, modesty, benignness and accommodation, attaining the virtues of Bodhisattva Samantabhadra. To say that [the Pure Land] transcends the Three Domains is still an understatement.

Section 3 of “The 5th Great Teaching” in this *Collection* presents a succinct comparison between the defiled environment of this world and the pure environment of the Land of Bliss. Upon reading it, feelings of admiration for the Pure Land and revulsion toward the defiled Saha world naturally emerge.

The principles of the *Collection* can be summed up in four key points:

1. Compatibility between the time and the teaching
2. Schools of the Sacred Path and the Pure Land School
3. Name-recitation according to Amitabha Buddha’s Fundamental Vow
4. Rebirth of ordinary beings in the Realm of Rewards.

I. Compatibility between the time and the teaching

For a practitioner determined quickly to transcend reincarnation and attain Bodhi in this lifetime, choosing a teaching for practice involves careful consideration of both the era and personal capability. Master Daochuo was born at the onset of the Age of Dharma Decline. He recommends in this *Collection* that for sentient beings with Dharma-Decline aptitudes, “reciting Amitabha’s name and seeking rebirth in the Pure Land” is the appropriate approach.

The *Collection* gets straight to the point in the opening section of the “1st Great Teaching” (on features of the teaching):

Assessment of both the current era and the capacities of beings... advocacy of rebirth in the Pure Land.

It holds that:

If teachings align with the times and the capacities of beings, they are easier to practice and comprehend. When teachings are ill-suited to the era and capacities, they become difficult to cultivate and accomplish.

Therefore, practitioners must first determine what is suitable for themselves. To support this assertion, the *Collection* references the *Sutra on Mindfulness of the Correct Dharma* and the *Moon Store Sutra of the Great Compilation* as evidence.

A message from the *Moon Store Sutra* is this:

In the present era, sentient beings are in the fourth 500-year period following the Buddha's departure. This is the time for repentance and cultivation of blessings, including the recitation of Amitabha's name.

In selecting teachings appropriate to the “time” and “capacity,” the exhortation clearly points out that “beings of the present era should recite Amitabha’s name.”

It further states:

The supreme achievement of Buddhahood is exceedingly difficult for those who seek enlightenment in this Saha world. Only through the Pure Land path we can hope for the ultimate attainment.

This statement succinctly says that in a world of the Five Turbidities and during the Age of Dharma Decline, when no Buddha is present, the practice and attainment of the Three Learnings and Six Paramitas become increasingly difficult. Entry into Bodhi is feasible only through the Pure Land teaching, specifically by seeking rebirth in the Pure Land through reliance on Amitabha’s deliverance. In other words, only the Pure Land School provides a pathway to Buddhahood in this iniquitous world of the Five Turbidities for beings who have consistently engaged in unwholesome deeds throughout their lives. It is the teaching that precisely aligns with both the “time” and the “capacity.”

II. Schools of the Sacred Path and the Pure Land School

In assessing the suitability of teachings in terms of “time” and “capacity,” the *Collection* categorizes Shakyamuni Buddha’s teachings into two types: the schools of the Sacred Path and the Pure Land School. The former relies on the practitioner’s own efforts in this Saha world to cultivate the Six Paramitas and myriad virtuous deeds, aiming to eradicate delusion, attain truth, achieve sainthood and reach fruition. By contrast, the Pure Land tradition depends on the power of Amitabha Buddha’s vows to seek rebirth in the Pure Land, where one can eliminate illusions, realize truth and attain Bodhi.

Master Daochuo’s demarcation of the Sacred Path and the Pure Land Path derives from Bodhisattva Nagarjuna’s classification long ago of the Dharma into the Difficult Path and the Easy Path. And it follows on from Master Tanluan’s more recent division into self-power and other-power.

Bodhisattva Nagarjuna distills Shakyamuni’s teachings into the Difficult Path and the Easy Path. The Difficult Path requires complete reliance on self-power for practice. It resembles travelling on foot, which makes for an arduous journey. Its characteristics are “miscellaneous, prolonged and prone to descent.” By contrast, the Easy Path relies solely on Amitabha’s deliverance. It is like sailing on water, which is joyous. Its features: “singular, quick and certain.”

Master Tanluan clarifies that being difficult or easy lies in whether one relies entirely on self-power or on other-power.

Daochuo not only inherits the landmark classifications of the earlier lineage masters. He also incorporates them into his well-organized,

methodical division into the Sacred Path and the Pure Land Path. The classification takes into account both “time” and “capacity,” based on extensive scriptural citations.

Master Daochuo distinguishes between the two paths, clearly intending to encourage practitioners to abandon the Sacred Path and embrace the path of deliverance through the Pure Land. The core essence of this *Collection* is the text known as “Demarcation between Schools of the Sacred Path and the Pure Land School.” It is in section 1 of the “3rd Great Teaching,” which states:

The Sacred Path, one of the two approaches, is difficult to yield enlightenment in this age. Firstly, because we are far removed from the era of the Great Sage. Secondly, due to the profoundness of the Dharma-principle and the limitations of our comprehension. Hence, the Moon Store Sutra of the Great Compilation says:

In the Age of Dharma Decline, billions and billions of sentient beings will engage in the practice of the Way, yet not one will attain it.

During the present Age of Dharma Decline, and in this unwholesome world of the Five Turbidities, only the path of the Pure Land provides a clear route to the gateway of enlightenment. Therefore, the Longer Sutra states...

This passage cites “two causes and one scriptural proof” as factual and theoretical evidence to show that the schools of the Sacred Path are blocked, impracticable and inaccessible. Conclusion: the Pure Land path is the sole clear route to the gateway of enlightenment.

The word “sole” implies selectivity and superiority. In other words, this teaching encompasses and surpasses all Dharma schools; it is the only teaching that does not resort to expedient means or rely on other causal conditions. Behind these terms lies a strong resolve to “abandon the Sacred Path and take refuge in Pure Land.”

As to being **“far removed from the era of the Great Sage,”** one of the “two causes,” some scholars argue that the expressions “Correct Dharma,” “Semblance Dharma” and “Dharma Decline” on the vertical timeline of “Ages” should instead be understood horizontally, applied to different types of people. Those with superior capabilities and intelligence, even in the current Age of Dharma Decline, can still make achievements characteristic of the Correct Dharma. Conversely, those of lesser ability may accomplish nothing, even in the Age of Correct Dharma, when the Buddha was present, as if they were in the Age of Dharma Decline. Therefore, the three phases of the Dharma are specific to individuals, not necessarily relevant to time.

This view is held predominantly by adherents of the Sacred Path. In practical terms, however, it amounts to empty rhetoric. As more time passes since the Buddha’s departure, the power of his teachings to educate and influence weakens progressively. Social morality declines at a rapid pace. Those intending to practice lack the ability to do so. Enlightenment remains distant and unforeseeable. This is the conspicuous state of affairs in the Buddhist community today.

From a materialistic perspective, techniques to enhance creature comforts continue to advance daily. But efforts to eradicate delusion and realize the truth are steadily deteriorating – an indisputable reality.

That is why the Great Sage, the Buddha, predicted: *“In the Age of Dharma Decline... not one will attain it.”* Hence, having *“teachings [aligning] with the times and the capacities of beings”* is as important as prescribing appropriate medicine for an illness. As it is said: “Medicine is neither valuable nor worthless; what works for the disease is good. A teaching is neither inherently superior nor inferior; what suits the practitioner’s circumstances is marvelous.”

Given the resolve to pursue enlightenment, a practitioner never deceives himself and, with wisdom, can make sound choices. Now, based on the Buddha’s sacred words, Master Daochuo explicitly advises:

During the present Age of Dharma Decline, and in this unwholesome world of the Five Turbidities, only the path of the Pure Land provides a clear route to the gateway of enlightenment.

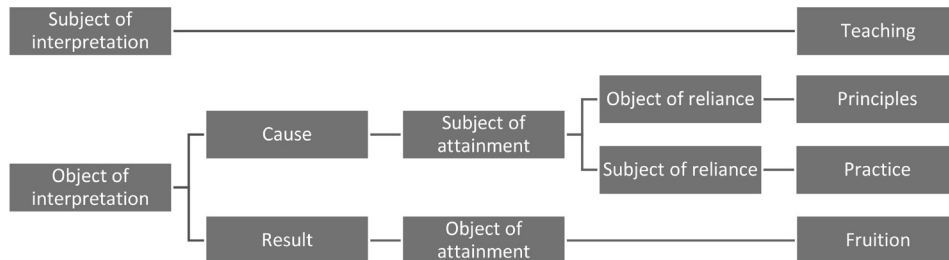
This text is truly a panacea for the multitudes, a non-retreating, downwind vessel through the boundless sea of suffering.

Regarding **“the profoundness of the Dharma-principle and the limitations of our comprehension,”** second of the “two causes,” “Dharma-principle” and “comprehension” are correlative terms. “Comprehension” denotes the subject that understands, while “Dharma-principle” is what is comprehended. The components of the Sacred Path are organized into four categories: teaching, principles, practice and fruition. “Teaching” is what explains, and “principle” is what is explained. The teaching of Shakyamuni Buddha serves as the subject of interpretation, and the principles revealed through this teaching constitute the object being interpreted.

Some examples include the *Lotus Sutra* presenting the concept of “ultimate reality of all dharmas,” the *Avatamsaka Sutra* exploring “non-obstruction among all phenomena,” the *Vimalakirti Sutra* discussing the “non-duality gate to inconceivable liberation,” and the *Nirvana Sutra* affirming that “all sentient beings have Buddha-nature.”

Applying “principles” to our three categories of actions – deeds, words and thoughts – is called “practice.” Thus, principles and practice are based on the relationship between what is relied upon and what relies upon it. Principles are the object of reliance, while practice is the subject.

Furthermore, our practice relies on principles to attain “fruition,” which establishes a relationship between the object attained and that which attains it. The subject, practice, brings about attainment, while the object, fruition, is attained through practice. An illustration:



Nonetheless, in the Age of Dharma Decline, our turbid, unwholesome proclivities prevent us from embodying the Sacred Path’s principles of the “ultimate reality of all dharmas” and “non-obstruction among all phenomena” in our three actions. This reflects “the profoundness of the Dharma-principle and the limitations of our comprehension.” The Sacred Path requires practitioners to understand the teaching with wisdom

and emphasizes such understanding as a significant component of practice. Thus, weak comprehension leads to “defective practice,” which ultimately results in failure to attain. Hence, the Buddha stated: “In the Age of Dharma Decline, not one will attain it.”

Conversely, by following the Pure Land School, we learn the “teaching” of the Three Pure Land Sutras, believe in the “principle” of other-power, engage in the “practice” of Amitabha-recitation, and attain the “fruition” of rebirth in the Pure Land and Buddhahood.

Both paths involve learning the Buddha’s teachings and aiming to attain enlightenment. Yet one requires painful effort while the other brings happiness; one is difficult, the other easy. To alleviate suffering and achieve joy, to forsake the difficult and choose the easy, to relinquish self-power and embrace other-power, to set aside the Sacred Path and enter the Pure Land Path – those precisely are the goals of this *Collection*. Hence it affirms:

Only the path of the Pure Land provides a clear route to the gateway of enlightenment... Given these teachings of the scriptures, why not forsake the difficult and embrace the Easy Path?

III. Name-recitation according to Amitabha Buddha’s Fundamental Vow

“Name-recitation according to Amitabha Buddha’s Fundamental Vow” is the essence of the Pure Land School. It originates from the 18th Vow in the *Longer Sutra*. Master Daochuo designates this vow as the doctrinal substance of the Pure Land teaching, known as the “Fundamental Vow,” and interprets it as “to recite Amitabha’s name.”

In the *Collection's* “3rd Great Teaching,” subsection 5 of section 3 (on the demarcation between Schools of the Sacred Path and the Pure Land School) states that according to the *Longer Sutra*:

Should sentient beings, even if they have done evil all their lives, recite my name continuously ten times as death approaches and fail to be born [in the Pure Land], may I not attain perfect enlightenment.

This teaching is precisely the fundamental principle of “Name-recitation according to Amitabha Buddha’s Fundamental Vow,” which began with Bodhisattva Nagarjuna.

Since the Sacred Path was thriving during Daochuo’s era, most of his contemporary Dharma masters from various schools valued meditative contemplation as a superior practice. Even when interpreting the *Contemplation Sutra*, they designated “Buddha-contemplation” as the scripture’s essence, which involves reflecting on the Buddha’s physical marks and characteristics. Master Daochuo, in order to tailor the teaching to different proclivities and draw practitioners of other schools to the Pure Land Path, outwardly proposed Buddha-contemplation as the essence. Implicitly, however, he advocated name-recitation, promoting it as the true essence.

Section 4 of *Collection's* “1st Great Teaching,” on “divergent core essences of various sutras,” states:

The core essence of the Contemplation Sutra is Buddha-contemplation samadhi.

Afterwards, the text simply advises practicing Buddha-invocation samadhi. The term “Buddha-invocation” encompasses both Buddha-contemplation and recitation of the Buddha’s name. This is known as “non-differentiation between recitation and contemplation” and “integration of recitation and contemplation.”

This principle was inherited by Master Shandao, Daochuo’s most accomplished disciple. Shandao further distinguished the two practices from each other clearly and made definitive judgments on which should be relinquished and which be embraced.

First, in Fascicle 1 of his *Commentary on the Contemplation Sutra in Four Fascicles*, in the “Section on the Underlying Meaning,” under the third subsection, “Gate of Purpose,” within the seven subsections, Shandao says:

The Contemplation Sutra takes Buddha-contemplation samadhi as its essence, and also Buddha-recitation samadhi as its essence.

This is known as the “twofold essence of recitation and contemplation.”

However, when it comes to drawing a conclusion, Shandao abandons contemplation and advocates recitation, exclusively emphasizing Buddha-recitation as the core essence. In Fascicle 4 of his *Commentary on the Contemplation Sutra*, in “Meaning of the Non-Meditative Practices,” he affirms in the “Circulation Section”:

Though preceding passages spoke of the merits of the meditative and non-meditative virtues, the Buddha’s underlying wish is that sentient beings recite Amitabha’s name single-mindedly.

Previously, as a skillful means to induce others according to their inclinations, Shandao proposed the “twofold essence of recitation and contemplation.” But now, focusing exclusively on the intention of the Fundamental Vow, he affirms name-recitation as the single core essence. It is evident that both the teacher and disciple were in accord, speaking with one voice.

No matter how exceptional a Dharma teaching may be, if it is difficult or even impossible for sentient beings to practice, it provides them with no benefit. While Buddha-contemplation is hard, reciting Amitabha’s name with faith in his deliverance is easy.

More importantly, “Buddha-contemplation” does not align with Amitabha’s Fundamental Vow, whereas name-recitation precisely does. Accordingly, Section 2 of the “4th Great Teaching” in this *Collection*, “Buddha-invocation emphasized in various scriptures,” cites two types of benefits from invocation: the “initial benefit” of always being embraced by Amitabha’s light, never to be abandoned, and the “ultimate benefit” of constantly beholding Amitabha Buddha after rebirth in the Pure Land. These two benefits are exclusive to Buddha-invocation — and absent from other practices. The point is to stress that Buddha-recitation surpasses all other practices and downplay the latter, urging devotees to recite Amitabha’s name.

Therefore, the “time” refers to the Age of Dharma Decline, and the “capacity” corresponds to ordinary beings. Only the teaching of the Pure Land path through Amitabha-recitation provides a clear route to the gateway of enlightenment.

IV. Rebirth of ordinary beings in the Realm of Rewards

This argument is presented in the *Collection* to rectify misconceptions about Pure Land teachings held by other schools in the Buddhist community of that time. After the Southern and Northern Dynasties, various masters from different schools put forth their views on Amitabha's Buddha-body and his Pure Land. Broadly speaking, these views can be summarized into the following three categories:

1. Reward Body and Realm of Rewards

Amitabha is a Reward Body Buddha, and the Land of Bliss is a Realm of Rewards, composed of the karmic rewards of Bodhisattva Dharmakara. Therefore, ordinary beings cannot be reborn there. Attaining rebirth through ten recitations merely implies an "intention for a different time (deferred rebirth)." Many masters of the Shastra School supported this perspective.

2. Transformation Body and Transformation Realm

Amitabha's Pure Land is "a rough realm, pure only in phenomena," also known as a "phenomenally pure realm," which is equivalent to a "Transformation Realm." As such, Amitabha Tathagata is considered a Transformation Body Buddha, and the Pure Land of Bliss is a Transformation Realm. Though ordinary beings can be reborn there, the realm is a Transformation Land and what they see is a Transformation Body Buddha. This view was endorsed by Masters Huiyuan of Jingyin Temple, Zhiyi of the Tiantai School, and Jizang of the Sanlun School, among others.

3. Integration of Reward and Transformation

Amitabha's Pure Land encompasses both a Realm of Rewards and a Transformation Realm. Bodhisattvas at the first stage and above are born in the Realm of Rewards, while ordinary beings and practitioners of the Two Vehicles are born in the Transformation Realm. This is the stance advocated by Masters Jiakai, Daoshi and Yuanxiao.

Although the above three interpretations differ, they all equally deny the possibility of ordinary beings' rebirth in the Realm of Rewards.

View No. 1 acknowledges that the Land of Bliss is a Realm of Rewards but completely denies that ordinary beings can be reborn there. It regards the "ten recitations" as merely sowing the seed for rebirth in a subsequent life, providing the causal conditions for future practice. Only when one's practice reaches a certain level can rebirth be realized. Views 2 and 3 affirm that ordinary beings can be reborn in the Pure Land, but judge that it is a Transformation Realm.

These views clearly show a lack of understanding of the profound significance of Amitabha's Fundamental Vow. They contradict the sutras, disregard scriptural principles, and seriously hinder the dissemination and development of the Pure Land teaching. Master Huaigan, a disciple of Shandao, expressed his regret: "For more than a century after the introduction of the *Compendium of Mahayana*, practitioners who have read this discussion [on 'deferred rebirth'] have chosen not to practice the Pure Land teaching."

Therefore, by referencing sacred texts, Master Daochuo highlights the principle that "ordinary beings can be reborn in the Realm of

Rewards.” He first confirms that Amitabha is a Reward Body Buddha and his Pure Land is a Realm of Rewards. Section 7 of the *Collection’s* “1st Great Teaching” cites the *Mahayana Same-Nature Sutra*:

Those who attain Buddhahood in pure realms are all Reward Bodies. Those who attain Buddhahood in defiled realms are invariably Transformation Bodies.

Since all pure lands arise as karmic rewards of the Buddhas’ vows and practices in the causal ground, they are all Realms of Rewards. Those who have attained enlightenment and Buddhahood in pure realms are undoubtedly Reward Body Buddhas.

Next, Daochuo ascertains that, by relying on the power of Amitabha’s vows, ordinary beings can be reborn in the Buddha’s Realm of Rewards. Section 8 of the “1st Great Teaching” in *Collection* says:

Amitabha Buddha’s Pure Land embraces those with capacities from the highest to the lowest; it is accessible to both ordinary and sacred beings. This Land of Infinite Life is the pure realm of Amitabha’s rewards. By virtue of his vows, it accommodates the full range of capabilities, allowing even those with virtues characteristic of ordinary beings to achieve rebirth there.

This teaching of “rebirth of ordinary beings in the Pure Land’s Realm of Rewards” was carried on by Master Shandao, Daochuo’s disciple, who was revered as an incarnation of Amitabha Buddha and gained renown throughout the Buddhist community.

In his *Commentary on the Contemplation Sutra*, a definitive work for all ages, Master Shandao clarifies the principle that Amitabha's Pure Land is a Realm of Rewards, not a Transformation Realm — in the sixth subsection, “Gate of Convergence,” within the seven subsections of Fascicle 1, “Section on the Underlying Meaning.” He then posed a question and answered it:

Question: Since both that Buddha and his land are of the Reward nature, and the dharma of Rewards is superb and wondrous, even lesser sages find it challenging to ascend. How can impure and obstructed beings gain entry?

Answer: Indeed, if we consider the impurities and obstructions of sentient beings, it is truly difficult to approach. However, by relying on Amitabha's vows as a powerful condition, all five vehicles are able to enter.

Shandao also says in his *In Praise of Dharma Practices*:

Simply because Amitabha's vows are powerful and all-encompassing, ordinary people attain rebirth just by reciting.

He also states:

By the power of the Buddha's vows, those who commit the five gravest transgressions and the ten evil actions can have their offenses eradicated and be reborn. Even slanderers of the Dharma and icchantika will be reborn if they turn their minds around.

Observing this, we can see that the interpretations by both the master and the disciple align perfectly, and can be deeply trusted.

Indeed, impure and obstructed beings lack the strength to transcend the defiled Six Realms of the Three Domains. However, by relying on the powerful karma of Amitabha's great vows, they not only permanently break free from the cycle of transmigration in the defiled realms but also directly enter the sublime and wondrous Realm of Rewards in the Pure Land. Thus, it is clear that the decisive factor for ordinary beings to be reborn in the Realm of Rewards is exclusive recitation of Amitabha Buddha's name.

This *Collection* has two stylistic features. First, all citations are paraphrased restatements, gathered, deliberated upon and harmonized comprehensively. Second, recitation and contemplation are integrated, and the Path of Importance and the Path of the Great Vow are unified, with the goal of attracting others according to their inclinations.

1. All citations are **paraphrased restatements, gathered, deliberated upon and harmonized comprehensively.**

In the *Collection*, Master Daochuo references a large number of sutras, vinayas, abhidharma shastras, commentaries and interpretations, more than 50 in all. As a stylistic feature, he does not repeat the texts verbatim. Instead, through gathering a multitude of scriptures and assessing their connotations, he has developed a comprehensive and harmonious understanding and memorized the scriptural intent. In composing *Collection*, he restates their main ideas in his own words. This is known as “paraphrased restatements of citations, gathered, deliberated upon and harmonized comprehensively,” as the ancients put it.

Undoubtedly, archaic scriptural text is obscure and its connotations are abstruse. Long passages can be intimidating, and words may not fully convey their intended meanings. Given that ordinary beings lack wisdom and insight into the scriptures, we would find the texts difficult to read and comprehend, and may even misinterpret their intent.

Master Daochuo, with his extraordinary erudition and wisdom, has thoroughly searched numerous texts and distilled their essence. He presents their profound principles in a straightforward style and language easily comprehensible to us, ordinary beings who lack wisdom. In this way, we can understand the wording at a glance and grasp the subtle truths. The *Collection* is aligned with both Dharma principles and our own capacities, appealing both to the sophisticated and the common. His sincere efforts deserve our utmost gratitude and admiration.

For example, the “Paraphrase of the Fundamental Vow” goes:

The Longer Sutra states:

Should sentient beings, even if they have done evil all their lives, recite my name continuously ten times as death approaches and fail to be born [in the Pure Land], may I not attain perfect enlightenment.

The phrase “even if they have done evil all their lives” does not match the exact language of the *Longer Sutra*, but it conveys the intended meaning. The original phrase in the 18th Vow, “**sentient beings of the ten directions,**” may not clearly specify the type of beings referred to. With his deep comprehension of the connotation, Master Daochuo identifies them as beings who “have done evil all their lives.”

The reason is that Amitabha's Great Compassion particularly focuses on suffering beings, with overwhelming commiserative mindfulness of those mired in endless reincarnation. This is like urgently saving a drowning person while leaving behind those already on the shore. Therefore, among the sentient beings in the ten directions, there are both ordinary people and saints, but the emphasis is on the ordinary.

Ordinary people consist of the virtuous and the wicked, and the wicked take precedence over the virtuous. Among the wicked, some may encounter the Dharma and find salvation during their lifetime, while those nearing death have no other way to be saved. Without deliverance through the power of Amitabha's Vow, they will immediately fall into hell. For this reason, Amitabha Buddha particularly sympathizes with the iniquitous who are near death and lack other options. This is why the paraphrase states "as death approaches."

Meanwhile, the phrase "even if" ensures that those who have been doing good all their lives are also encompassed. Thus no sentient being is excluded from Amitabha's deliverance, from the virtuous at the highest Mahayana rebirth level to the wicked at the lowest tier with the Five Transgressions.

Without Daochuo's paraphrase, Amitabha's compassionate vow would have regrettably remained hidden and unmanifest, leaving repentant wrongdoers without a path to rebirth in the Pure Land. For all future generations, Master Daochuo has clarified the profound significance of Amitabha's supreme vow, which encompasses all capacities and provides universal, impartial deliverance. We should be deeply grateful.

Moreover, in Daochuo's era, the practice of "ten recitations" was often misinterpreted as "contemplating and recollecting the Buddha." This approach deviates from the Buddha's original intention of an easy practice and contradicts the Fundamental Vow that Amitabha had deeply pondered over five *kalpas*.

Master Daochuo corrects the deviation. He interprets the practice as "recite my name continuously ten times," replacing contemplation and recollection with oral recitation. This interpretation highlights the original intention of Amitabha Buddha and the utmost simplicity of the practice, unveiling the exact meaning of the sutra. Later, Master Shandao directly paraphrases it as "recite my name, even ten times." The interpretations of both master and disciple thoroughly and effectively communicate the Buddha's intention, illuminating the past through the present.

Given that those with short lives who are approaching death can attain rebirth in the Pure Land through just ten recitations, those with longer lifespans who recite during their regular lifetime can secure rebirth with even greater certainty.

From this, we can infer the following: For evildoers nearing death who exhibit signs of hellish downfall and are destined for Avici, their rebirth through ten recitations is not due to their own strength. Throughout their lives, they have engaged only in wickedness, never practicing the Way. Instead, it is solely the power and function of Amitabha Buddha's merit and virtue that override their negative karma at the time of death. Through the ten recitations, these wicked ones reveal their transformed minds, their resolve to entrust their lives to Amitabha, and their sincere yearning for the Buddha's deliverance to the Pure Land.

Of course, if one's remaining time is insufficient to recite ten times, rebirth in the Pure Land can still be attained through five, three or even one recitation. The "Fulfilment Text of the 18th Vow" affirms that even a single recitation of Amitabha's name will lead to rebirth. This is because rebirth in the Pure Land depends on the great power of Amitabha's Fundamental Vow rather than on the efforts of any ordinary being, who is inherently weak and inferior. Therefore, whether virtuous or wicked, as long as we recite Amitabha's name, we all will be reborn in the Pure Land.

To say "as long as we recite Amitabha's name" is not to dismiss other practices. It simply stresses that, if the goal is rebirth in the Land of Bliss, such rebirth does not depend on our own efforts at cultivation. As Pure Land practitioners who deeply believe in karma and aspire to rebirth in the Pure Land, we are obliged as a matter of course to behave morally, fulfil our worldly responsibilities, maintain integrity and sincerity, observe vegetarian eating, refrain from killing, aid the poor and weak, and, as far as our circumstances and abilities allow, practice the Five Precepts, Ten Good Actions and Six Paramitas.

Even so, aspirants to rebirth must first understand that, regardless of the varying degrees of good or evil exhibited by sentient beings, Amitabha's deliverance is impartial and all-encompassing. With this realization, virtuous people will feel a profound gratitude for the Buddha's benevolence, compelling them to perform further good deeds as a way of reciprocating. Wrongdoers, realizing that they too can be delivered by the Buddha, will voluntarily strive to purge evil from their hearts and embrace virtue. Touched by Amitabha's Great Compassion, our hearts are moved to genuine gratitude and to practice virtue.

When we embrace the life of Amitabha within us, we naturally take his mind as our own mind and his undertakings as our undertakings. We delight in performing virtuous practices, and joyfully forgive others' faults. We experience Amitabha's love and care for us, so we love and care for others. We are forgiven by Amitabha and we forgive others. Furthermore, this is because Amitabha bestows upon us the splendid Land of Bliss, and pays off our karmic debts from myriad lifetimes.

Those who cannot love and forgive others can still receive Amitabha's love and forgiveness. Once they feel Amitabha's love and forgiveness, they will undoubtedly become capable of loving and forgiving. Those who have difficulty loving and forgiving others have not yet experienced Amitabha's love and forgiveness.

“Softening upon being touched by the light of Amitabha” is a natural, spontaneous process. Therefore, when those guilty of a “lifetime's wickedness” believe in and accept Amitabha's deliverance, they are embraced and protected by the Buddha's light, enabling their transformation from wicked to virtuous. Such transformation is inevitable. To be honest, as iniquitous ordinary beings subject to endless transmigration since time immemorial, what evils have we not committed? What grudges have we not created? The debts we owe to others are immeasurable. Thus the issue is not about forgiving others, but rather about seeking their forgiveness.

Because we have Amitabha, we possess peace, hope and goodness within us.

2. Integration of recitation and contemplation, and unification of the Path of Importance and the Path of the Great Vow, with the goal of attracting others according to their inclinations.

“Recitation” refers to the oral invocation of Amitabha’s name. “Contemplation” involves the mental recollection of Amitabha or visualization of his image. The Path of Importance encompasses both meditative and non-meditative virtuous practices. The Path of the Great Vow signifies Amitabha Buddha’s Fundamental Vow — his 18th Vow. This vow is extensive and all-encompassing, aiming to deliver sentient beings universally throughout the ten directions without exception. Thus it is termed the “Great Vow.”

When interpreting the *Contemplation Sutra* in this *Collection*, Master Daochuo primarily integrates recitation and contemplation, as discussed in Point 3 above. Therefore, in his exposition of the doctrinal substance of the Pure Land teaching, he unifies the Path of Importance and the Path of the Great Vow.

For instance, in Section 1 of the “3rd Great Teaching” (the Difficult Path and the Easy Path), when he elucidates the Easy Path, Daochuo cites Tanluan’s statement “*believing in Amitabha Buddha, and aspiring to be reborn in the Pure Land.*” He then elaborates: “*one develops faith, establishes virtues, and cultivates all practices.*” The initial quote pertains to recitation within the Path of the Great Vow, while the elaboration relates to other virtuous practices (both meditative and non-meditative), which are attributed to the Path of Importance.

The primary cause of rebirth in the Pure Land is the exclusive recitation of Amitabha’s name within the Path of the Great Vow. This practice, constituting the very substance of the Great Vow, is accessible to beings in the ten directions — and why the Pure Land School is known as the Easy Path. It forms the doctrinal essence of the Pure Land teaching. However, the meditative and non-meditative virtuous practices within the Path of Importance fall outside the scope of the Great Vow and are virtually impossible to accomplish for most sentient beings in the ten directions. These practices are difficult, explicitly not easy. Thus they do not make up the doctrinal substance of the Pure Land teaching.

Why is that? Subsection 5 in section 3 of the “3rd Great Teaching” (the Sacred Path and the Pure Land Path) declares: ***“Only the Pure Land path provides a clear route to the gateway of enlightenment. Therefore, the Longer Sutra states: ...”*** The assertion is immediately followed by the “Paraphrase of the 18th Vow.” This structure underscores that the 18th Vow is precisely the doctrinal essence of the Pure Land teaching, in which Master Daochuo himself seeks refuge and entrusts his life.

Next, starting with ***“Moreover, all sentient beings,”*** he extends the discussion from the highest teachings of the Great Vehicle (Mahayana), encompassing “True Suchness, Ultimate Reality and First-Principle Emptiness,” to the Lesser Vehicle and worldly virtues. He indicates that all self-power practices taught by the schools of the Sacred Path are unsuitable for the era of Dharma Decline and its attendant capacities.

Finally, Daochuo states, ***“when it comes to engaging in malevolence and committing transgressions, how are they different from a violent storm? Thus, out of Great Compassion, all Buddhas recommend***

seeking rebirth in the Pure Land.” He concludes that meditative and non-meditative practices should be renounced, and advises us to concentrate on the single practice under the 18th Vow — the exclusive recitation of Amitabha’s name.

Daochuo’s differentiation between the Sacred Path and the Pure Land Path delineates the “actual teaching” and “actual capacity” specific to the Pure Land School. Master Shandao further elucidates through “two kinds of deep faith”: “deep faith with reference to the capacity of sentient beings” and “deep faith with reference to the deliverance of Amitabha Buddha.” The former emphasizes an understanding of our own precise capability and inclination, while the latter underscores our recognition of the true appropriate teaching. Within this deep faith, both “actual capacity” and “actual teaching” are encapsulated.

It is evident that the doctrinal substance of the Pure Land School is the Path of the Great Vow (Amitabha-recitation) rather than the Path of Importance (meditative and non-meditative practices). So why does Master Daochuo unify these two paths in his interpretation? This approach is what is known as “inducing (or attracting) others according to their inclinations.” Its purpose is to draw individuals of diverse dispositions and guide them towards the Pure Land. This method of interpretation is commonly seen throughout *Collection*.

Master Daochuo may be regarded as the lineage master who revitalized the Pure Land School, and his *Collection* a treasured classic for the revival of Pure Land teachings.

Earlier, Tanluan’s *Commentary* explicated the intent of “other-power” underlying the Fundamental Vow in the *Longer Sutra*. As a

result, the ease of Pure Land practice became widely recognized, and the significance of “name-recitation according to the Fundamental Vow” resonated deeply with people. It won Tanluan profound admiration from both the Southern and Northern emperors, and led to extensive refuge-taking by the four groups of Buddhist disciples. Regrettably, after Tanluan’s departure for the Pure Land, the rising popularity of the Shastras School within the Buddhist community substantially weakened the influence of the Pure Land teachings.

Fortunately, 68 years after the passing of Master Tanluan, Master Daochuo set aside his highly accomplished propagation of the *Nirvana Sutra* and devoted himself to the singular path of the Pure Land. He vowed to be Tanluan’s posthumous disciple, intensively studied the *Commentary*, and carried forward the understated implications in Tanluan’s teachings. He authored this *Collection* to dispel the prevailing prejudices and misconceptions about the Pure Land teachings.

Later, Shandao’s *Commentary* continued Daochuo’s teachings, and cleared uncertainties among the ancient sages and the misunderstandings of his Dharma peers. During this time, the recitation of Amitabha’s name echoed throughout Chang’an City, and the Pure Land lineage thrived.

Magnificent indeed! Master Daochuo, a successor of Tanluan and a predecessor of Shandao, flourished between these two lineage masters. Alone, he wielded the treasure sword of Amitabha’s Great Compassion, repudiated the delusional attachment to the “intention for a different time,” and directed the misguided onto the Pure Land path. Without Daochuo and his *Collection*, the Pure Land lineage might have disintegrated. Great are the achievements and benevolence of Master

Daochuo; we shall never forget them and forever hold them in the highest esteem.

Though this preface is complete, I deeply feel the immense, expansive power of Amitabha's vows, which neither exclude any being of any inclination, nor forsake wrongdoers. They ensure that defiled beings of the Age of Dharma Decline always have a chance for salvation, with no place for despair.

Full of excitement, I have dashed off a verse titled "No Matter What"; it is appended below. Though lacking in eloquence, it carries profound meaning, which I hope to savor along with fellow Amitabha-reciters.

No Matter What

*No matter what, Amitabha's Fundamental Vow
Is like diamond, never changing.*

*No matter what, Amitabha thinks of me
Like a mother remembers her child, never abandoning it.*

*No matter what, Amitabha is with me
Every moment, never letting me go.*

*No matter what, sinful sentient beings
Need Amitabha and the deliverance of his Fundamental Vow.*

*No matter how contaminated and impure,
False and hypocritical are sentient beings,
Amitabha's deliverance never changes.*

*No matter how sentient beings desire and detest,
Are deluded and vicious,
Amitabha's deliverance never changes.*

*No matter how deep beings' offenses and heavy their afflictions,
However intense their sufferings,
Amitabha's deliverance never changes.*

*No matter how beings commit the Five Gravest Offenses,
Or slander the Dharma and lack self-cultivation,
Amitabha's deliverance never changes.*

*Because the Fundamental Vow exists, our minds are at ease,
Hope arises and people turn virtuous.*

*Because no matter what, no matter what,
Amitabha Buddha's deliverance is certain,
Amitabha Buddha's deliverance is certain.*



First Fascicle

In this *Collection on the Land of Peace and Joy*, there are 12 Great Teachings. Each cites sutras and treatises as evidence to encourage the development of faith and the aspiration to rebirth in the Pure Land.



The 1st Great Teaching

The First Teaching, for all the extensive texts and principles cited, is summarized in nine sections, followed by detailed explanations.

1. Reasons for the rise of the Pure Land teaching, assessment of both the current era and the capacities of beings, and advocacy of rebirth in the Pure Land.

2. Methods and principles of teaching and hearing, as expounded in various Mahayana texts.

3. The various lengths of time since sentient beings first awakened the Bodhi-mind and the differing numbers of Buddhas to whom they have made offerings, as detailed in the sacred Mahayana teachings. The aim is to inspire the audience to vigorously awaken the Bodhi-mind.

4. Divergent core essences of various sutras.

5. Diverse naming conventions of sutras. For instance, the *Nirvana Sutra* and the *Prajna-Paramita Sutra* are named after the Dharma teachings they expound. Some derive their titles from metaphors, events, or temporal and geographical references, among other methods. The *Contemplation Sutra* is named after both a person and a teaching: “As spoken by the Buddha” denotes the person, and “Contemplation of Infinite Life” refers to the teaching.

6. Sundry speakers of sutras. The initial expounders of all sutras fall into one of five categories:

- i. Shakyamuni Buddha himself;
- ii. His sacred disciples;
- iii. Celestial beings;
- iv. Immortals;
- v. Transformed beings.

Among the five categories, the *Contemplation Sutra* was spoken by Shakyamuni Buddha himself.

7. Brief introduction of the [Buddha's] True Body and Transformation Body, and distinctions between the True Land and Transformation Land.

8. Amitabha's Pure Land accommodates those with capacities ranging from the highest to the lowest, and is accessible to both ordinary and sacred beings.

9. Whether Amitabha's Pure Land is included in the Three Domains.

1. Reasons for the rise of the Pure Land teaching

This section explains the reasons for the rise of the Pure Land teaching, assessment of both the current era and the capacities of beings, and advocacy of rebirth in the Pure Land.

If teachings align with the times and the capacities of beings, they are easier to practice and comprehend. When teachings are ill-suited to the era and capacities, they become difficult to cultivate and accomplish.

Therefore, the *Saddharma-smṛty-upasthāna Sūtra (Sūtra on Mindfulness of the Correct Dharma)* states:

***Practitioners in their quest for the Way, single-mindedly,
Should always assess the timing and the expediency.
When the right time or means they cannot obtain,
It is deemed a loss, not a gain.***

Why is that?

***Seeking fire by drilling wet wood,
No flame acquired, the timing's not good.
Splitting dry logs to seek water,
Fruitless efforts, as wisdom's not in place.***

Hence, it is stated in the *Great Assembly Sūtra*:

After the Buddha's Parinirvana, my disciples will be firmly established in their study of wisdom in the first 500 years; in meditation practice in the second; in erudition and chanting in the third; in constructing pagodas and temples, as well as in cultivating blessings and repentance, in the fourth. In the fifth 500 years, as the White Dharma (pure teachings) becomes obscured and stagnant, leading to numerous disputes, only a very few will remain steadfast in virtuous practices.

Also, it is stated in that sutra:

When Buddhas appear in the world, they employ four methods to deliver sentient beings. What are these four?

i) They verbally expound the Twelve Canonical Divisions – this is deliverance through offering the Dharma.

ii) Tathagatas emanate infinite light and exhibit magnificent features. Sentient beings who, with focused mind, reflect upon these aspects will invariably gain benefit – this is deliverance through physical karma.

iii) With boundless virtues, functions, transcendental powers and sublime faculties, they perform various transformations – this is deliverance through supernatural powers.

vi) Tathagatas are known by innumerable names, both collective and specific. Sentient beings who, with concentrated mind, recite these names remove obstacles, reap benefits, and will be reborn in the presence of a Buddha – this is deliverance through names.

In the present era, sentient beings are in the fourth 500-year period following the Buddha's departure. This is the time for repentance and cultivation of blessings, including the recitation of Amitabha's name. Uttering "Amitabha Buddha" a single time can eliminate the negative karma of birth and death accumulated over eight billion *kalpas*. If a single recitation brings such merit, how much more so would the continuous practice of recitation. It would establish a practitioner in constant repentance.

Moreover, for those close to the era of the Great Sage (Shakyamuni Buddha), the primary practice was the former – the cultivation of meditation and wisdom, with the latter serving as auxiliary practices. For those in eras distant from the Sage’s time, the primary practice shifts to the latter categories – name-recitation, while the former assume a secondary role. Why is this? Because sentient beings far removed from the Buddha’s time are shallower and inferior in capacity and understanding.

Therefore, Mahasattva (Queen) Vaidehi seeks benefits for herself and, out of sympathy, for the beings of the Age of Dharma Decline in the world of the Five Turbidities, who endure countless *kalpas* of transmigration, futilely suffering pains and burnings. Hence, leveraging her distressing circumstances, she implores the Buddha for a broad, clear path out of suffering. Through compassionate empowerment, the Great Sage advocates rebirth in the Land of Bliss.

The supreme achievement of Buddhahood is exceedingly difficult for those who seek enlightenment in this Saha world. Only through the Pure Land path we can hope for the ultimate attainment.

Exploring various scriptures, we would find numerous teachings on the same theme. A collection of True Words has been compiled for the benefit of practitioners. Why? Those who achieve rebirth earlier will hopefully guide those who come later, who seek guidance from the former. This cycle should continue indefinitely, never ceasing until the boundless ocean of samsara has dried up.

2. Methods and principles of teaching and hearing

According to the Mahayana texts, this section presents the methods and principles of teaching and hearing, consisting of six subsections.

i) The *Great Assembly Sutra* states:

The Dharma teacher should be considered a healing king, a remover of sufferings. The teachings expounded should be viewed as nectar and the finest cream. Listeners should be considered as enhancing their supreme understanding and curing their maladies. If this perspective is embraced, both the teacher and the listeners are equipped to perpetuate and enrich the Dharma. They will constantly be reborn in the presence of Buddhas.

ii) The *Treatise on the Perfection of Wisdom* states:

Listeners gaze intently, as if quenching their thirst, Immersing themselves wholeheartedly in the meaning of the words.

Hearing the Dharma, hearts cheering yet grieving; People such as these are worthy of the teaching.

iii) The *Treatise* also asserts:

Two kinds of people receive boundless and infinite blessings. Who are these two? The first are those who take joy in teaching the

Dharma, and the second are those who delight in hearing it. Consequently, Ananda asked the Buddha: “Why do Sariputra and Moggallana possess the most exceptional wisdom and supernatural powers among the sacred disciples?” The Buddha replied: “In their time of causal cultivation, for the cause of the Dharma, traveling thousands of miles was painless for them. Therefore, today they stand as the most exceptional.”

iv) The *Longer (Infinite Life) Sutra* says:

***A person without the root of goodness
Has no chance of hearing this sutra;
Those who are pure and uphold the precepts
Can hear this teaching of correct Dharma.***

v) The *Longer Sutra* also declares:

***Those who have repeatedly seen the World-Honored Ones
Can believe in this teaching.
Those who have served billions of Tathagatas,
Take pleasure in hearing it.***

vi) The *Sutra of Infinite Pure Enlightenment* states:

If good men and women, upon hearing the teachings of the Pure Land, experience a mix of sorrow and joy in their hearts, and their body hair stands on end as though being plucked, you should know that these persons have cultivated the Buddha path in their past lives.

If anyone, upon hearing the teachings of the Pure Land, does not develop faith, you should know that the person has recently emerged from the Three Wretched Realms, with negative karmic retributions not yet fully exhausted, resulting in the lack of faith and devotion. I declare that such a person is not yet ready for liberation.

Therefore, the *Longer Sutra on the Infinite Life* affirms:

***Those who are arrogant, misguided or indolent
Can hardly have faith in this teaching.***

3. The various lengths of time since sentient beings first awakened the Bodhi-mind

Based on the sacred Mahayana teachings, this section explains the varied lengths of time since sentient beings first awakened the Bodhi-mind, as well as the different numbers of Buddhas to whom they have made offerings.

The *Nirvana Sutra* states:

The Buddha told Bodhisattva Kasyapa: “Sentient beings who have awakened the Bodhi-mind in the presence of as many Buddhas as the grains of sand in the Nairanjananadi River – half

the size of the Ganges River – may hear this Mahayana sutra in an unwholesome world without giving rise to slander.

“Those who have awakened the Bodhi-mind in the presence of as many Buddhas as the grains of sand in the entire Ganges can listen to this sutra in an unwholesome world without engendering slander, instead fostering deep appreciation and delight.

“Those who have awakened the Bodhi-mind before as many Buddhas as twice the grains of sand in the Ganges are able to refrain from slandering this teaching in an unwholesome world, correctly understand and joyfully embrace it in faith, and engage in accepting, upholding, reading and chanting it.

“Those who have awakened the Bodhi-mind in the presence of as many Buddhas as three times the grains of sand in the Ganges have the capacity to avoid slandering this teaching in an unwholesome world. Although they copy it by hand and explain it to others, they may not yet grasp its profound significance.”

Why is this comparison necessary? It highlights the fact that today’s listeners have already awakened the Bodhi-mind and made offerings to numerous Buddhas.

Moreover, to demonstrate the unfathomable power of Mahayana sutras, it is stated in that sutra:

Sentient beings who hear this sutra will not fall into the Wretched Realms for billions and thousands of kalpas. Why is this? In areas where this wondrous sutra is spread, you should

know that such places are [as indestructible as] vajra, and the people similarly resemble vajra.

We should thus understand that those who hear the sutra and awaken faith all attain unfathomable benefits.

4. Different core essences

This section differentiates the core essences of various sutras.

For example, the *Nirvana Sutra* has Buddha-nature as its essence. In the *Vimalakirti Sutra*, it is inconceivable liberation; the *Prajna Sutra* centers on emptiness-wisdom; and the *Great Assembly Sutra*, dharanis.

The core essence of the *Contemplation Sutra* is Buddha-contemplation samadhi. The objects of contemplation are no more than the two kinds of rewards - direct (the beings) and circumstantial (the environment). These will be further delineated below, in connection with each type of contemplation.

For example, in the *Sutra on Buddha-Contemplation Samadhi*, it is stated:

The Buddha told his father, the King: “When Buddhas appear in the world, they bring three kinds of benefits.

“First, by verbally expounding the Twelve Canonical Divisions (of the Tripitaka), they give Dharma teachings to benefit beings,

removing the darkness and obscurities of their ignorance, opening their eyes of wisdom, and allowing them to be reborn in the presence of Buddhas and swiftly attain supreme Bodhi.

“Second, Tathagatas have bodies of radiant brightness and infinite splendor. Sentient beings who recite or contemplate the features of a Buddha, whether general or specific, and whether of the present or the past, will eradicate the Four Major Offenses and the Five Gravest Transgressions. This leads to permanent liberation from the Three Wretched Realms and allows them to be constantly reborn in pure lands at will, ultimately achieving Buddhahood.

“Third, I would advise the King, my father, to practice Buddha-invocation samadhi.”

The King addressed the Buddha: “Why do you not allow me, your disciple, to cultivate the fruition virtues in the Buddha-ground, such as True Suchness, Ultimate Reality, and First-Principle Emptiness?”

The Buddha replied to the King: “The fruition virtues of Buddhas encompass infinite, profound and wondrous realms, along with supernatural powers and ultimate liberation. These are not realms accessible to ordinary beings in their practice. Therefore, I advise you, Father, to practice Buddha-invocation samadhi.”

The King asked the Buddha: “What are the characteristics of the merits gained from Buddha-invocation?”

The Buddha responded: “Picture a forest of eranda trees, spanning forty yojanas in size. In it, there is a gosirsaka-candana tree, whose roots and buds have yet to emerge from the ground. The eranda forest emits only a foul odor, without any fragrance. Beings who consume its flowers or fruits will become delirious and die.

“Later, as the roots and buds of the candana gradually grow and the tree begins to mature, its rich fragrance transforms the entire forest, filling it with an all-pervasive, beautiful aroma. Everyone who sees this develops a sense of wonder.”

The Buddha told the King: “It is the same with the mind of Buddha-invocation in sentient beings, who are ensnared in the cycle of birth and death. Those who maintain a continual focus on invocation are guaranteed rebirth in front of the Buddha. Upon such rebirth, they have the capacity to transform all negative karma into Great Compassion, the way the candana tree transforms the eranda forest.”

In this context, the “eranda forest” symbolizes the Three Poisons, Three Obstacles and the myriad grave offenses inherent in sentient beings. The “candana” represents the minds of sentient beings in Buddha-invocation. The phrase “the tree begins to mature” signifies that, should sentient beings consistently accumulate invocations without interruption, their karmic path towards Bodhi is accomplished.

Question: By measuring the collective merit of all sentient beings practicing Buddha-invocation, it is possible to know its entirety. But how can a single invocation have the power to eradicate all obstacles, the way

a single candana tree transforms a forty-*yojana*-wide eranda forest into a realm of beautiful fragrance?

Answer: According to various Mahayana sutras, Buddha-invocation samadhi exhibits unfathomable functions. What are these? As stated in the *Avatamsaka Sutra*:

Consider a lute strung with the sinews of a lion. When the sound is played, all other strings shatter. Those who practice Buddha-invocation samadhi with Bodhi-mind can completely dispel all afflictions and barriers.

Similarly, imagine a person collecting milk from various animals, such as cows, sheep, donkeys and horses, and placing it in a single container. If a drop of lion's milk is added, it directly permeates through without difficulty, causing all the other milk to spoil and turn into clear water. Those who practice Buddha-invocation samadhi with Bodhi-mind overcome all demons (maras) and obstacles without difficulty.

The sutra also states:

Think of a person who moves about, hidden with a potion of invisibility, rendering him unseen by others. Those who practice Buddha-invocation samadhi with Bodhi-mind become invisible to all evil spirits and hindrances. They can travel anywhere without obstruction. Why is this so? Because Buddha-invocation samadhi is the king of all samadhis.

5. Diverse naming conventions of sutras

6. Various speakers of sutras

7. Three bodies and three lands

The 7th Great Teaching briefly clarifies the meaning of the three bodies and the three lands.

Question: What kind of body is the current Amitabha Buddha? What kind of realm is the Land of Bliss?

Answer: The current Amitabha is a Reward Body Buddha. His treasured, magnificent Land of Bliss is a Realm of Rewards.

However, traditional accounts have long asserted that Amitabha Buddha is a Transformation Body, and his land a Transformation Land. Those are significant misconceptions. Should this be the case, then both defiled and pure realms would be inhabited by Transformation Bodies. Hence the question: In which realm would the Reward Bodies of Tathagatas reside?

According to the *Mahayana Same-Nature Sutra*, a clear distinction exists between Reward and Transformation Bodies and between pure and defiled realms. The scripture says:

Those who attain Buddhahood in pure realms are all Reward Bodies. Those who attain Buddhahood in defiled realms are invariably Transformation Bodies.

The sutra further declares:

Tathagatas such as Amitabha, Kingly Star of Blooming Lotuses, King of Dragon Lords, and Treasured Virtue, along with those who have attained and will attain enlightenment in pure Buddha realms, are all Reward Body Buddhas.

What are the Transformation Bodies of Tathagatas? These include figures like today's Tathagata Robust Leaper, Tathagata Mara-Terrifier and all similar Tathagatas, as well as those who have achieved and will achieve Buddhahood in defiled, turbid worlds. Beginning with descent from Tushita Heaven to earth, and continuing through the sustenance of all the Ages of Correct Dharma, Semblance Dharma, and Dharma Decline, they undertake various transformative actions. All these are Transformation Body Buddhas.

What is the Dharma Body of Tathagatas? The true Dharma Body of Tathagatas is devoid of form, shape, manifestation and attachment. It cannot be seen or spoken of, nor does it abide anywhere. It is beyond arising and perishing. This is the meaning of the true Dharma Body.

Question: Reward Bodies of Tathagatas are eternal. But why does the *Avalokitesvara Prediction Sutra* state that after Amitabha Buddha enters Parinirvana, Bodhisattva Avalokitesvara will be next in line to assume the role of Buddha?

Answer: This pertains to the Reward Body of Amitabha manifesting the aspect of becoming invisible, rather than undergoing true extinction. The sutra itself states:

After Amitabha Buddha enters Parinirvana, sentient beings with profound and solid virtuous roots will still be able to see him as they did before.

This statement serves as evidence.

The *Treatise on the Precious Nature* states:

The Reward Body possesses five characteristics:

- 1. Imparting Dharma teachings;***
- 2. Being visible;***
- 3. Ceaselessly engaging in all [Buddha's] deeds;***
- 4. Ceasing and becoming invisible;***
- 5. Manifesting insubstantial entities.***

This constitutes further evidence.

Question: Where are Tathagata Shakyamuni's Reward Body and his Realm of Rewards located?

Answer: As stated in the *Nirvana Sutra*:

West of this realm, beyond as many Buddha Lands as the grains of sand in forty-two Ganges Rivers, lies a land called “Unsurpassed.” All its splendors are on par with those of the Western Land of Bliss, without any difference. I first emerged in that land, and for the deliverance of sentient beings, I came to this Saha world. My appearance in that realm was not unique; all Tathagatas did likewise.

This serves as evidence.

Question: The *Drum Sound Sutra* states that Amitabha Buddha had parents. This clearly indicates that he is not a Reward Body Buddha and his land is not a Realm of Rewards.

Answer: You have merely heard the words of the sutra without delving into its underlying essence, leading to your doubt. A hair’s breadth of error can lead you astray by a thousand miles.

Amitabha Buddha also possesses the Three Bodies. The form that emerges in the Land of Bliss is his Reward Body. The mention of having parents refers to the parents of his Transformation Body manifested in a defiled realm. In a similar vein, Tathagata Shakyamuni, who attained his Reward Body in a pure realm, appeared through an emanation in this Saha world, where he manifested with parents and became a Transformation Body Buddha. Amitabha Buddha followed the same pattern.

Also, according to the *Drum Sound Sutra*:

At that time, Amitabha Buddha convened with the assembly of Sravakas in the country known as “Serene Prosperity.” The city, the residence of the sacred king, measured 10,000 yojanas in both length and width. Amitabha Buddha’s father was the chakravartin named “Moon King,” and his mother was “Supremely Wondrous Face.” The Mara King was titled “Non-Victorious.” The Buddha’s son bore the name “Moon Bright,” while Devadatta was called “Tranquil Mind.” The Buddha’s attendant was dubbed “Stainless Title.”

The above passage relates solely to the attributes of a Transformation Body. In a pure land, would there be a *chakravartin*, a city, women and so forth? The text’s meaning is clear and requires no additional differentiation. Your insufficient analysis has resulted in misunderstanding and undue attachment.

Question: If a Reward Body possesses the characteristic of ceasing and becoming invisible, can pure realms similarly undergo the processes of formation and destruction?

Answer: Such difficult questions have been raised from ancient times to the present, and explaining them has always been a formidable challenge. However, I will cite scriptures as evidence, which should help illuminate the connotations.

Just as the bodies of Buddhas eternally exist, sentient beings still view them as entering Parinirvana. So it is with pure realms. Their substance is not subject to formation or destruction, but sentient beings

perceive them as undergoing formation and destruction. As stated in the *Avatamsaka Sutra*:

**Like beholding the mentor,
Myriad forms of splendor.
As beings' mental states differ,
So do their views of Buddha realms.**

Therefore, the *Treatise on the Pure Land* [by Dao'an] says:

**Not fixed as a singular substance,
Purity and impurity manifest in varying degrees.
Not fixed as distinct in substance,
Exploring origins uncovers concealed unity.
Not fixed as devoid of substance,
Through dependent origination, myriad phenomena come to be.**

So we know that it is pointless to distinguish between clarity and turbidity, with respect to pure realms of Dharma-nature. But with the Reward and Transformation Realms, which manifest from (the Buddhas') Great Compassion, the distinction between purity and defilement cannot be ignored.

Moreover, as a general clarification, there are three kinds of differences among Buddha Lands, based on disparities in sentient beings' capabilities and sensibilities:

The first are those deriving directly from the Truth Realm, known as "Realms of Rewards." It's like the sunlight shining across the Four Continents. The Dharma Body resembles the sun, with the Reward and

Transformation Bodies akin to the sunlight.

The second type, emerging suddenly out of nothing, is referred to as a “Transformation Realm.” As mentioned in the *Four-Division Vinaya*:

Tathagata Dipamkara transformed two adjacent cities, Deva and Vati. Their inhabitants engaged in intermarriage and interactions. Subsequently, [the Tathagata] manifested a sudden fire, burning both cities to ash. Witnessing this display of impermanence, the sentient beings developed a deep revulsion and turned towards the Buddhist path.

Therefore, the *[Vimalakirti] Sutra* states:

**At times, he manifests a kalpa fire,
Consuming both heaven and earth.
To sentient beings clinging to permanence,
He spotlights the truth of impermanence.**

**At other times, aiding the impoverished,
He reveals a treasurehouse that’s never finished.
Guiding widely as conditions align,
He inspires awakening of the Bodhi-mind.**

The third type involves concealing the defiled realm and revealing the pure abode. As described in the *Vimalakirti Sutra*:

When the Buddha pressed the ground with his toe, the three-thousand-fold worlds turned splendid and pure without exception.

The Land of Infinite Life is a Realm of Rewards deriving directly from the Truth Realm. How do we know? It is stated in the *Avalokitesvara Prediction Sutra*:

In the future, Avalokitesvara will attain Buddhahood and succeed Amitabha Buddha.

Hence we know that the Pure Land is a Realm of Rewards.

8. Accessibility to both ordinary and sacred beings

This section clarifies that Amitabha Buddha's Pure Land embraces those with capacities from the highest to the lowest; it is accessible to both ordinary and sacred beings. This Land of Infinite Life is the pure realm of Amitabha's karmic rewards. By virtue of his vows, it accommodates the full range of capabilities, allowing even those with virtues characteristic of ordinary beings to achieve rebirth there. And, because it encompasses elevated faculties, Vasubandhu and Nagarjuna, along with other Bodhisattvas of advanced stages, were also reborn there.

Thus the *Longer Sutra* states:

Bodhisattva Maitreya asked the Buddha: "How many non-retrogressive Bodhisattvas in this world achieve rebirth in that Buddha Land?"

The Buddha replied: “In this world, 6.7 billion non-retrogressive Bodhisattvas will be reborn in that Buddha Land.”

Should extensive scriptural references be made, it is similar in the worlds of all other directions.

Question: Given that Amitabha’s Pure Land is described as embracing capacities from the highest to the lowest, accessible to both ordinary and sacred beings, this remains unclear: Is rebirth in that realm exclusive to those who undertake practice without forms, or is it also attainable by ordinary beings who still cling to phenomenal characteristics?

Answer: Ordinary beings, superficial in wisdom, often seek rebirth through reliance on phenomenal characteristics. They will indeed attain rebirth. However, because the virtue associated with phenomenal characteristics is limited, they are reborn only in the realm with characteristics, where they see only Buddhas of the Reward and Transformation Bodies.

Therefore, it is stated in the “Chapter on Bodhisattvas’ Practices in Past Lives” from the *Sutra on Buddha-Contemplation Samadhi*:

Manjusri addressed the Buddha: “I recall countless kalpas ago, during my time as an ordinary being, there was a Buddha in the world known as Tathagata Supreme King of Precious Sublime Virtue. His manifestation bore no difference from the present Buddha - with a 16-foot stature and a body of purple-golden hue. He too expounded the teachings of the Three Vehicles, just as Shakyamuni does.

At the time in that land, there was a noble elder named All-Giving. He had a son called Guardian of Precepts. While carrying the child, his mother, out of respect and faith, had already committed him to the Three Refuges. Following his birth, at the age of eight, his parents welcomed the Buddha into their home for offerings. Upon seeing the Buddha, the boy paid homage, his heart brimming with profound reverence, his gaze unwavering. This mere encounter with the Buddha cleansed him of the negative karma that causes birth and death for trillions of nayuta kalpas. Henceforth, he was repeatedly reborn in pure realms, encountering as many Buddhas as the grains of sand in a hundred billion nayuta Ganges Rivers.

Those World-Honored Ones, too, employed their magnificent characteristics to deliver sentient beings. The boy of the earlier time personally served each of them without fail. He made prostrations and offerings, and contemplated the Buddhas with palms pressed together. Due to the power of such karma, he further encountered a million asamkhyeya Buddhas.

These Buddhas, likewise, converted and delivered sentient beings through their physical forms and characteristics. Since then, he mastered ten billion gates of Buddha-invocation samadhi and asamkhyeya dharani gates. Upon achieving these, all the Buddhas appeared before him to expound the Dharma without forms. In mere moments, he attained Shurangama samadhi.

At that earlier time, the boy had merely undertaken the Three Refuges, bowed to the Buddha, and attentively observed the

Buddha’s form with an untiring heart. This very causal condition allowed him to meet innumerable Buddhas. How much greater, then, is the benefit when one fully focuses his mind to reflect on the Buddha’s physical form? Was that boy from the past someone else? No, he was indeed myself, Manjusri, in a former life.”

At that time, the World-Honored One commended Manjusri: “Excellent, Excellent! By virtue of a single salutation to a Buddha, you encountered innumerable Buddhas; how much more will this be true for my future disciples who consistently practice Buddha-contemplation and Buddha-invocation?”

The Buddha instructed Ananda: “Remember these words of Manjusri and convey them to the assembly and all beings of future ages. If a person can pay homage to a Buddha, invoke the Buddha or contemplate the Buddha, you should know that this person is equal to Manjusri and the like without any difference. Upon that person’s departure from this life, Manjusri and other Bodhisattvas will serve as his personal teachers.”

This text confirms that the Pure Land encompasses a realm with phenomenal characteristics, so rebirth there is beyond doubt. Those who understand that the fundamental essence is devoid of phenomenal characteristics and independent of thoughts, and seek rebirth there, are likely to be reborn as upper-tier aspirants.

Therefore, as Bodhisattva Vasubandhu says in his *Treatise on Rebirth*:

If one can contemplate the twenty-nine categories of splendor and purity, then they are encompassed in the One Dharma Verse. The One Dharma Verse is the Purity Verse. The Purity Verse represents wisdom and the Unconditioned Dharma Body.

Why is it necessary that the expansive and the brief versions are mutually encompassing? The reason is that each of the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas has two kinds of Dharma Bodies: the Dharma Body of Dharma-Nature and the Dharma Body of Expediency. The former produces the latter, and the latter represents the former. The two Dharma Bodies are different yet inseparable, uniform but non-identical. For this reason, the expansive and the brief accounts are mutually encompassing. Without understanding such mutual incorporation, Bodhisattvas cannot benefit themselves and others.

“Unconditioned Dharma Body” is the body of Dharma-Nature. As Dharma-Nature is in the state of Tranquil Extinction, the Dharma Body is free from phenomenal characteristics. Being free from phenomenal characteristics, there is no phenomenal characteristic that the Dharma Body cannot manifest. So the resplendent characteristics and refinements [of the environment and beings of the Pure Land] are [manifestations of] the Dharma Body. Whereas the Dharma Body transcends perception, there is nothing it does not know. Therefore All-Inclusive Wisdom is True Wisdom.

Though one contemplates through the general and specific verses in the context of dependent origination, there is nothing that is not absolute reality. Knowing absolute reality, [the Bodhisattvas] realize that sentient beings in the Three Domains are false, delusive

phenomenal manifestations. With such realization, they generate true compassion. Since they know true compassion, they initiate true refuge-taking.

Contemporary practitioners, both monastics and laypersons, who understand that “rebirth in the Pure Land is birthless” and thereby align with the Two Truths, are most likely to attain rebirth as upper-tier aspirants.

9. Inclusion or non-inclusion in the Three Domains

This section clarifies whether Amitabha’s Pure Land is included in the Three Domains.

Question: In which of the Three Domains is the Land of Peace and Joy included?

Answer: The Pure Land is exquisitely sublime. Its essential substance transcends the worldly realm.

These Three Domains resemble a dark house for unenlightened ordinary beings. The pleasures of living things are just slightly different from their sufferings. Their lifespans vary in length, but overall, nothing here is not in the long river of imperfections. [Disasters and blessings] coexist, depend on one another and alternate in succession without end. Beings are mired in various states of existence and undergo mixed

sensations and feelings. They cling incessantly to the Four Inverted Beliefs. From causes through consequences, delusion and futility persist unceasingly. Profoundly repugnant these all are. Therefore, the Pure Land is not included in the Three Domains.

Further, according to the *Treatise on the Perfection of Wisdom*:

The rewards of Pure Lands are without desire, therefore they are not of the Desire Realm; with solid foundations, they are not of the Form Realm; with forms of existence, they are not of the Formless Realm. Although described as having solid foundations, they are exquisitely transcendent and remarkably wondrous.

Hence Vasubandhu states in his *Treatise on Rebirth*:

*I reflect on the features of that land;
It transcends the path of the Three Domains.
Ultimately it is like the void,
Immense and boundless.*

Therefore, as extolled in *In Praise of the Longer Sutra*:

*In the land of wonder, vast and unbounded,
Formed naturally from seven jewels compounded.
Adorned by power of the Buddha's fundamental vows,
To this pure great embrace, I offer my reverent bows.*

*His realm glows with marvels unmatched,
Pleasant and peaceful, from four seasons detached.
To benefit self and others, perfect power he's hit,
To him adorning with skillful means, my life I commit.*



The 2nd Great Teaching

Chapter Two comprises three sections:

1. Awakening of the Bodhi-mind.
2. Refutation of divergent views and erroneous attachments.
3. Extensive exchange of questions and answers to dissolve doubts.

1. Awakening of the Bodhi-mind

This initial section concerns the awakening of the Bodhi-mind and includes four subsections:

- i) Functions of the Bodhi-mind.
- ii) Terminology and essence of Bodhi.
- iii) Different factors in the awakening of the Bodhi-mind.
- iv) Questions and answers.

- *Functions of the Bodhi-mind.*

The *Longer Sutra* states:

Those who wish to be reborn in the Pure Land must awaken the Bodhi-mind as the fundamental source.

Why is that? Bodhi is the name of the supreme Buddha-path. The mind that aspires to Buddhahood is vast, encompassing the entire Dharma realm. This mind extends to the ultimate and is equal to the boundless void. It sustains, reaching infinitely into the future. It embraces universally, unobstructed by the limitations of the Two Vehicles.

Upon awakening this mind, one transcends all the merit and virtues from beginningless births, deaths, existences and declines. When dedicated to Bodhi, they endure until the attainment of Buddhahood, without disappearing or being lost. This can be likened to preserving flowers in the Five Pure Abodes, where they remain unwithered by wind and sun; or to storing water in a divine river, which never runs dry, even amid worldly drought.

- *Terminology and essence of Bodhi.*

There are three kinds of Bodhi:

- i) Dharma Body Bodhi
- ii) Reward Body Bodhi
- iii) Transformation Body Bodhi

In “Dharma Body Bodhi,” the term “Dharma Body” signifies True Suchness, Ultimate Reality and the First-Principle Emptiness. It is pure in its own nature, and free from defilements and contaminations in its substance. Its essence emerges from natural reality and requires no cultivation to achieve. [Here,] “Bodhi” is the fundamental essence of the Buddha-path.

As for “Reward Body Bodhi,” “Reward Body” denotes the fruition of a Reward Buddha evoked by the thorough cultivation of myriad virtuous deeds — the consequence of causal practices. [In this context,] “Bodhi” signifies their unobstructed, perfect accomplishment.

Concerning “Transformation Body Bodhi,” “Transformation Body” describes the functions originating from the Reward Body Buddha, adept at accommodating the myriad proclivities of beings. [As such,] “Bodhi” depicts the benefiting of sentient beings fully and flawlessly.

- *Different factors in the awakening of the Bodhi-mind.*

Three factors underlie the cultivation of causal practices and development of the Bodhi-mind:

i) Recognizing the principle of existence vs. non-existence, that Self-Nature is pure from the origin.

ii) Cultivating myriad virtuous deeds, as guided by causal conditions; they include mastering the 84,000 paths of Paramita.

iii) Embracing Great Compassion as the foundational focus, with a steadfast commitment to the deliverance of beings.

These three causal factors resonate with Great Bodhi, so they are known as triggers of the Bodhi-mind.

Apart from the above, as stated in the *Treatise on Rebirth in the Pure Land*:

The awakening of Bodhi-mind now referred to is the resolve to become a Buddha. Such a mind wishes to deliver sentient beings. The mind wishing to deliver sentient beings is the mind aspiring to induce beings to be reborn in realms where there are Buddhas. Therefore, aspirants to rebirth in the Pure Land must first awaken the Bodhi-mind.

- *Questions and answers.*

Question: If thoroughly cultivating myriad virtuous deeds can lead to Bodhi and the attainment of Buddhahood, why then does it say in the *Sutra on the Inaction of All Dharmas*:

**If a person seeks Bodhi,
Then Bodhi cannot be.
The seeker strays from Bodhi far,
As distant as earth from the star.**

Answer: The concrete essence of Bodhi should be pursued from the noumenal aspect, free from phenomenal characteristics. Seeking Bodhi as a phenomenon does not align with the noumenal reality. Hence it is said that “the seeker strays far.” Therefore, the *[Vimalakirti] Sutra* states:

Bodhi cannot be attained through the mind, or through the body.

The practitioners referred to here, though they pursue Bodhi through their practices, are acutely aware that its noumenal essence is beyond seeking. Nevertheless, they do not abandon the use of provisional designations. Hence they diligently cultivate myriad virtuous deeds in an effort to realize Bodhi.

For this reason, the *Treatise on the Perfection of Wisdom* declares:

***Should one see Prajna,
Such is being bound;
Should one not see Prajna,
Such is still being bound.***

***Should one see Prajna,
Such is being liberated;
Should one not see Prajna,
Such is also being liberated.***

As Bodhisattva Nagarjuna explains:

In this context, being confined to the Four Terms of Differentiation signifies bondage, while transcending the Four Terms represents liberation.

In the pursuit of Bodhi, if one can practice in such a manner, it is to practice without [the discriminative awareness of] practice. This “practice without practice” is in line with the Great Principle of the Two Truths.

Additionally, according to Vasubandhu’s *Treatise on Rebirth in the Pure Land*:

For anyone aspiring to attain the supreme Bodhi, there are two essential principles:

- 1. One must first avoid three kinds of non-conformity with the Bodhi-gate.*
- 2. One must know three kinds of conformity with the Bodhi-gate.*

What are the three? First, by relying on the “gate of wisdom,” one refrains from seeking pleasures for himself. He distances his mind from the notion of ego and attachment to self.

Second, by relying on the “gate of compassion,” one eradicates the sufferings of all sentient beings, and distances his mind from unwillingness to comfort them.

Third, by relying on the “gate of expediency,” one sympathizes with all sentient beings, and distances his mind from expectations of veneration and offerings for himself.

This is called averting three kinds of non-conformity with the Bodhi-gate.

As for “conformity with the Bodhi-gate,” by averting the “three kinds of non-conformity with the Bodhi-gate,” a Bodhisattva attains the “three kinds of conformity with the Bodhi-gate.”

What are the three? The first is the undefiled pure mind, because he refrains from seeking his own pleasures. Bodhi is a pure realm free of defilements. Seeking one’s own pleasure is contrary to the Bodhi-gate. Therefore, the undefiled pure mind conforms with the Bodhi-gate.

The second is the pacifying pure mind, because one eradicates the sufferings of all sentient beings. Bodhi is a pure realm that gives peace and comfort to all sentient beings. If one does not resolve to deliver all beings from the suffering of birth-and-death, he goes against Bodhi. Therefore, eradicating the sufferings of all sentient beings conforms with the Bodhi-gate.

The third is the joy-giving pure mind, because one enables all sentient beings to attain Great Bodhi, and embraces them to be reborn in the Pure Land. Bodhi is the realm of ultimate permanence and joy. If one does not enable all sentient beings to attain ultimate permanence and joy, he deviates from the Bodhi-gate. What do beings rely on to attain ultimate permanence and joy? They rely on the Great Principle Gate. The Great Principle Gate is precisely the Buddha Land of Peace and Joy.

Hence, it is recommended to aspire single-mindedly to rebirth in the Pure Land, with the goal of swiftly achieving the supreme Bodhi.

2. Refutation of divergent views and mistaken attachments

This section, which refutes divergent views and erroneous attachments, comprises nine subsections.

i) Refutation of the misconceived notion that “Mahayana is without form.”

ii) Reconciliation of “Bodhisattvas’ Great Compassion arises from desire and false views.”

iii) Refutation of the misconception that “there is no dharma outside the mind.”

iv) Refutation of the “preference for rebirth in defiled realms over pure realms.”

v) Refutation of the view that “those born in the Pure Land tend to be attached to pleasures.”

vi) Refutation of the criticism that “seeking rebirth in the Pure Land falls under the Lesser Vehicle.”

vii) Refutation of “preferring rebirth in Tushita Heaven over the Pure Land.”

viii) Reconciliation of the proposition that “seeking rebirth in pure lands of the ten directions is not comparable to aspiring to the Western Land of Bliss.”

ix) Discussion on “intention for a different time.”

To begin with, [from] the “refutation of the misconceived notion that ‘Mahayana is without form’,” the argument unfolds in two episodes:

Initially, it elucidates the general origin [of the nine errors] to enable practitioners in the future to discern right from wrong, discard erroneous views, and align with authentic teachings.

Subsequently, it thoroughly addresses the [nine] attachments, demonstrating the correct perceptions to refute them.

First of all is the general origin [of the nine errors]. In the profound Mahayana scriptures, terms and meanings are as innumerable as grains of dust and sand. This is why the *Nirvana Sutra* states:

A single term encompasses boundless meanings. A single meaning corresponds to boundless terms.

To grasp the essence of a single scripture, one must meticulously examine a wide array of texts. This approach differs from that of the Lesser Vehicle and secular writings, where interpretations are confined to the literal text.

Why is that necessary? The Pure Land teachings are abstruse and vast, with scriptures varying from cryptic to explicit. This engenders various conjectures from unenlightened minds, leading to flawed interpretations and blind obstinacy. Such misunderstandings sow confusion and ignorance, obstructing rebirth in the Pure Land. Below are a few examples, each accompanied by its refutation.

- *Refuting the mistaken idea that “Mahayana is without form.”*

Question: Some argue that Mahayana advocates non-characteristics and negates differentiation between this and that [realm]. Desiring rebirth in the Pure Land could be seen as an attachment to characteristics or form, thereby increasing entanglements and afflictions. What then is the justification for seeking rebirth there?

Answer: Such reasoning is incorrect. Why? Because when Buddhas expound the Dharma, two conditions must be met: firstly, it is grounded in the true essence of Dharma-nature; secondly, it aligns with the Two Truths (ultimate and worldly truths).

The assertion that Mahayana is devoid of differentiating notions is based solely on Dharma-nature. But the misguided negation of pursuing rebirth through causal conditions contradicts the Two Truths. Those who hold this view fall into the misperception of nihilistic emptiness.

Therefore, the *Supreme Reliance Sutra* states:

The Buddha told Ananda: “If sentient beings generate the view of self, as vast as Mount Sumeru, I do not fear it. Why? Because although they haven’t yet achieved liberation, they do not destroy [their belief in] cause and effect and thus will not forfeit their future rewards [of attainment]. However, if one embraces nihilistic emptiness, even as tiny as a mustard seed, I do not condone it. Why? Because such a notion disrupts [belief] in cause and effect, often leading to descent into the Wretched Realms. In his future existences, he will invariably stray from my teachings.”

Advice to practitioners: Though Ultimate Reality is birthless, the principle of the Two Truths invalidates the negation of pursuing rebirth through causal conditions. All seekers of rebirth can attain it. Therefore, the *Vimalakirti Sutra* states:

Though [they] contemplate both the Buddha Lands and sentient beings as void, [Bodhisattvas] persistently cultivate their pure

realms, teaching and transforming all living beings.

Furthermore, that sutra says:

Although they practice without doing, they manifest reincarnated bodies; such is the practice of Bodhisattvas.

Although they practice without arising, they perform all virtuous deeds; such is the practice of Bodhisattvas.

This is the definitive proof.

Question: In today's world, there are those who practice the Mahayana teaching of non-characteristics, disregarding any distinction between this and that. Yet they completely neglect the observance of precepts. How should this be understood?

Answer: Such an approach is exceedingly harmful. Why? As the *Mahavaipulya Sutra* states:

The Buddha laid down precepts for Upasakas, prohibiting them from visiting the homes of widows and virgins, and from engaging with liquor sellers, dye works, oil refineries and leather workshops.

Ananda asked the Buddha: "For which types of people did the World-Honored One establish these precepts?" The Buddha told Ananda: "There are two kinds of practitioners: those who practice as laypeople and those as monastics. For monastics, I do not restrict the above matters; it is for laypeople that I set out these restrictions. Why? All sentient beings are my children, and

the Buddha is their parent. Precepts are designed to guide and restrain them, facilitating their early liberation from the worldly realm and attainment of nirvana.”

- ***Reconciling “Bodhisattvas’ Great Compassion arises from desire and false views.”***

Question: According to the sacred Mahayana teachings, if a Bodhisattva develops Great Compassion towards sentient beings stemming from desire and false views, it ought to be relinquished. Now, by urging sentient beings to seek rebirth in the Pure Land together, does this not signify a contamination by desire and an attachment to phenomenal characteristics? How can this remove their entanglement of afflictions?

Answer: Bodhisattva-practices yield two functions:

- a) Realizing Emptiness-Wisdom, or Prajna;
- b) Attaining Great Compassion.

First, through the power derived from cultivating Prajna, Bodhisattvas, even while navigating the cycle of birth-and-death in the Six Realms, are not ensnared by afflictions and contaminations. Second, with mindful concern for sentient beings out of Great Compassion, Bodhisattvas do not remain in the realm of nirvana. While residing within the Two Truths, they can always adeptly transcend [the clinging notions of both] existence and non-existence, embracing or relinquishing each according to a middle path, without departing from the greater principle.

Therefore, the *Vimalakirti Sutra* states:

Imagine a person planning to build a palace on empty land; he can proceed freely without obstacles. But attempting such a task in the air would prove impossible. Similarly, Bodhisattvas, aiming to guide beings to enlightenment, aspire to establish Buddha Lands. Yet, the aspiration to create Buddha Lands cannot be fulfilled in emptiness.

- ***Refuting the misconception that “there is no dharma outside the mind.”***

It comprises two parts: Refutation of delusional speculations, and questions and answers for explanation.

a) Refutation of delusional speculations.

Question: Someone says that pure objects of contemplation correspond to practitioners’ inner beings; since pure lands are all-encompassing and universally pervasive, a pure mind itself constitutes a pure land. Given that no dharma exists outside the mind, why then is there a need to journey westward?

Answer: The pure land of Dharma-nature is, in noumenal terms, non-material and all-encompassing, with its essence entirely unbounded. This represents the “birthless birth,” a domain accessible only to practitioners of superior capability.

Hence, the *Wordless Treasure Casket Sutra* states:

Good man, there is yet another teaching realized by the Buddha. This teaching proclaims that all dharmas neither go nor come, and have no cause or condition, no arising or ceasing, no thought or non-thought, and no increase or decrease.

The Buddha asked Rahula: “Do you now accept and retain this true dharma principle I have expounded?” At that moment, nine hundred million Bodhisattvas from the ten directions promptly responded: “We are all capable of upholding this teaching and will disseminate it among sentient beings without cease.”

The World-Honored One declared: “Therefore, you good men indeed shoulder the task of Bodhi. You will immediately achieve unceasing eloquence and attain virtuous and pure Buddha Lands. At the end of this life, you will behold Amitabha Buddha and the sacred assembly present before you, and you shall be reborn in the Pure Land.”

However, there naturally exist people of medium and lesser capabilities who have yet to transcend the illusion of phenomenal characteristics. They must rely on their faith in the Buddha to seek rebirth in the Pure Land. Though they may reach that realm, they reside in the abode that retains phenomenal characteristics.

The sutra further states:

Assimilating conditioned phenomena back to the fundamental essence implies that there are no dharmas outside the mind; however, if one distinguishes the Two Truths to clarify the meaning, it does not hinder the understanding that the Pure

Land also exists as a dharma outside the mind.

b) Questions and answers for explanation.

Question: You mentioned that only practitioners of superior capability can attain the birthless birth, while those of medium and lesser abilities cannot. Is this judgment made simply by correlating [the proclivities of] practitioners with the respective Dharma [accomplishments], or is it also supported by sacred teachings?

Answer: The *Treatise on the Perfection of Wisdom* states:

Bodhisattvas with newly formed resolve are weak in capacity and understanding. Though they have awakened Bodhi-mind, they mostly aspire to be reborn in pure lands. What is the reason for this?

Imagine an infant who, without the loving care and nurture of parents, may face various dangers, such as falling into pits or wells, being burned or bitten by snakes, or dying from a lack of mother's milk. Only through the parents' tender caresses, washing, nursing and rearing can the child grow and ultimately inherit the family legacy.

Bodhisattvas are similar. Upon awakening the Bodhi-mind, they mostly aspire to be reborn in pure lands. There, they can draw near to Buddhas and grow their Dharma Body. Only then can they uphold and perpetuate the lineage of Bodhisattvas, aiding and delivering sentient beings in the ten directions. It is for this benefit that most Bodhisattvas desire rebirth in pure lands.

Moreover, the *Treatise* declares:

Consider a young bird. Its wings not yet fully developed, it cannot be forced to fly high. It must initially rely on moving from branch to branch within the forest. Only when its feathers have fully grown and become strong can it leave the forest and soar through the sky. Similarly, Bodhisattvas with newly formed resolve must first seek rebirth in the presence of a Buddha by dint of his vows. As their Dharma Body matures, they are then able to respond and bring benefit to sentient beings as needed.

In addition, the *Treatise* proclaims:

Ananda addressed the Buddha: “Where should this Paramita without characteristics be taught?” The Buddha responded: “This teaching should be imparted in the stage of Non-retrogression (Avaivart). Why? Because there are Bodhisattvas with newly formed resolve who, upon hearing this Paramita without characteristics, have all their pure, virtuous roots completely extinguished.”

Furthermore, once reborn in the Pure Land, all endeavors will be complete. What purpose does it serve to debate the profundity or simplicity of these teachings?

- *Refuting the “preference for rebirth in defiled realms over pure realms.”*

Question: Some say that they wish to be reborn in a defiled land to teach and guide sentient beings, rather than seek rebirth in a pure land. What is to be made of this?

Answer: Such people indeed exist. Who are they? Those who have reached the stage of Non-retrogression or beyond. For the purpose of converting impure and wicked beings, they can remain unstained while dwelling in the corrupt world, and their resolve does not waver when facing evil. This is similar to geese and ducks that enter the water but are not wetted. Only such persons are capable of living amid defilement to alleviate the suffering of others. In the case of truly ordinary people, whose own practices are not yet solid, they tend to waver when they encounter suffering. Their intention to aid others often leads instead to their mutual downfall. It's like forcing chickens into water; how can they avoid becoming drenched?

Therefore, the *Treatise on the Perfection of Wisdom* says:

If an ordinary person makes resolutions and aspires to rescue sentient beings in a defiled land, the Buddha's intention does not permit this.

Why is that? Bodhisattva Nagarjuna explains [in the *Treatise*]:

Consider an expanse of ice stretching forty miles. If one pours a liter of hot water onto it, it might appear momentarily to diminish the ice a little. But by the dawn following the night, that very spot becomes even more elevated than the surrounding areas. It is similar for ordinary people who vow to save others in this realm. They face a multitude of agreeable and disagreeable circumstances, which incite greed and aversion. Consequently, they generate afflictions within themselves, leading to their own descent into the Wretched Realms.

- *Refuting the view that “those born in the Pure Land tend to be attached to pleasures.”*

Question: Some argue that the Pure Land contains only joy, which may cause many of its inhabitants to be attached to pleasure. That would hinder or even undermine their self-cultivation towards enlightenment. Why should one aspire to be reborn in such a place?

Answer: Since it is termed Pure Land, it is devoid of all impurities. To speak of attachment to pleasure is to talk about the vexations of greed and desire. How then can this be called pure?

Hence the *Longer Sutra* states:

When human and celestial beings in that Land come and go, move forward and remain still, they are free from emotional attachments.

Additionally, it is declared in the 48 Vows:

If celestial and human beings from the ten directions who are reborn in my land should generate thoughts of attachment to their bodies, may I not attain perfect enlightenment.

The *Longer Sutra* further states:

Human and celestial beings in that land have no thought of partiality or prejudice.

How, then, could there be any attachment to pleasure?

- *Refuting the “criticism that seeking rebirth in the Pure Land falls under the Lesser Vehicle.”*

Question: Some assert that seeking rebirth in the Pure Land falls under the Lesser Vehicle. Why then should it be practiced?

Answer: This is not so, either. Why? Simply because the teachings of the Lesser Vehicle never expressly indicate rebirth in a pure realm.

- *Reconciling the “aspiration for rebirth in the Tushita Heaven” with advocacy to be reborn in the Pure Land.*

Question: Some state that they wish to be “reborn in the Tushita Heaven, not to seek the Western Pure Land.” What is the nature of this matter?

Answer: The principle is not the same. There are seemingly minor similarities, but significant differences in essence. Four aspects can be discerned. What are they?

a) Maitreya, the World-Honored One, turns the Dharma-wheel of non-retrogression for his celestial assembly [in Tushita Heaven]. Those who develop faith upon hearing his teachings receive benefit. This represents a “similarity in terms of faith” [with the Western Pure Land]. Yet, those who indulge in pleasure and lack faith are numerous. Furthermore, although one is born in Tushita, the stage is subject to retrogression. That is why the *Lotus Sutra* states:

There is no safety in the Three Domains, which resemble a burning house.

b) Upon rebirth in Tushita Heaven, one attains a lifespan of four thousand years. At the conclusion of this lifespan, retrogression and descent are inevitable.

c) In Tushita Heaven, there are streams, birds, trees and forests that resonate with harmonious, graceful melodies. But they serve solely as causal conditions to evoke the pleasure of celestial beings, resonating with the five desires. They do not support the sacred path.

If sentient beings aspire to Amitabha's Pure Land, upon rebirth there, they all reach the Non-retrogression stage (*Avaiivart*), and there is no one subject to retrogression cohabiting with them. Furthermore, their stage is flawless, transcending the Three Domains, and they are definitively freed from samsara. Their lifespan is equal to that of Amitabha, beyond numerical comprehension. The streams, birds, trees and forests there all impart Dharma teachings, enabling beings to awaken understanding and realize the Endurance for the Non-Arising of Dharmas.

d) Based on the *Longer Sutra*, comparisons of music are made, as stated in [Tanluan's] *In Praise of the [Longer] Sutra*:

***From earthly monarchs to the Sixth Heaven's sphere,
Music's wonder ascends through eightfold tiers,
Each surpassing the previous by billions of times,
Jeweled trees' melodies excel in equal primes.***

*Spontaneously arising, the chorus tunes of merit;
Dharma sounds harmonious, pleasing mind and spirit,
Elegant and sonorous, transcending the ten directions.
Thus, I bow to this music of purity and perfection.*

- *Showing that “seeking rebirth in pure lands of the ten directions does not compare to returning to the Western Pure Land.”*

Question: Some say that they wish to be reborn in pure realms of the ten directions rather than in the Western Pure Land. How should this be understood?

Answer: The principles are different; there are three considerations. What are they?

a) Buddha Lands of the ten directions are not impure. Yet when the object of contemplation is expansive, the mind becomes obscure, whereas a narrowly defined contemplative object promotes concentration.

Therefore, the *Sutra on Rebirth in the Ten Directions According to Wishes* states:

Bodhisattva Universal Expansive addressed the Buddha: “World-Honored One, all Buddha Lands in the ten directions are splendid and pure. Why then do the scriptures overwhelmingly acclaim Amitabha’s Land in the West, advising us to be reborn there?”

The Buddha replied: “The majority of sentient beings are mired in turmoil and confusion, while those with correct mindfulness are scarce. To aid in their focused devotion, I praise that Land, distinguishing it from others. Those who practice in accordance with their aspiration will invariably gain benefit.”

b) Pure lands in the ten directions are all immaculate, yet discerning their degrees of profundity is difficult. Amitabha’s Pure Land serves as the initial gateway to these pure realms. How do we know? According to the *Avatamsaka Sutra*:

One kalpa in the Saha world is equivalent to one day and night in the Land of Bliss. One kalpa in the Land of Bliss equals one day and night in the Kasaya Banner Land. Through such progressive comparisons of the inferior and the superior, there are ten asamkhyeya pairs of comparison.

We therefore understand that the Pure Land serves as the initial gateway to pure realms. This is why all Buddhas overwhelmingly acclaim rebirth there. Other Buddha Lands do not receive such emphatic exhortation. Therefore, faithful disciples predominantly aspire to be reborn in that Land.

c) Given that Amitabha’s Pure Land is the initial gateway to pure realms, the Saha world is the final phase of defiled lands. How do we know?

In the *Saddharma-smṛty-upasthāna Sutra* (the *Sutra on Mindfulness of the Correct Dharma*), it is said:

Northeast from here is a world named Sikha. Its ground consists entirely of triangular sandstones. It rains only three times a year, each rainfall moistening the land no more than five inches deep. The inhabitants subsist entirely on fruits and wear tree bark for clothing. They cannot fulfill their desire for life or their wish for death. In another world, tigers, wolves, fowls, other beasts, and even snakes and scorpions have wings and can fly. Encounters lead to mutual devouring. No distinction is made between virtue and vice.

Do these not signify the incipient stage of defiled realms? However, the Saha world's retributive environment is shared with the virtuous and the sacred, positioning it to be the concluding phase of defiled realms. Given that the Land of Peace and Joy is the initial gateway to pure realms, it directly adjoins this world in their sequence. Rebirth there is remarkably straightforward. Why not pursue it?

- ***Examining an apparent discrepancy between the Mahayana-samgraha (Compendium of Mahayana) and the Contemplation Sutra to clarify the concept of “intention for a different time.”***

In the *Contemplation Sutra*, the Buddha describes a person of the lower grade who has committed grave offenses. At the moment of death, this person encounters a Dharma friend and, after completing ten recitations of Amitabha's name, attains rebirth in the Pure Land. By reference to the *Compendium*, it has been alleged that this teaching “implies the Buddha's intention for a different time.”

Moreover, from ancient times, those proficient in the *Compendium* have mostly interpreted this passage as follows: “The ten recitations at the time of death merely serve as a cause for rebirth [in the Pure Land], but rebirth is not attained immediately. How do we know? The *Compendium* explains: ***‘Earning a thousand coins from one cannot be accomplished in a single day.’*** It is thus evident that completing ten recitations functions only as a cause; immediate rebirth does not ensue. Therefore, this teaching implies the Buddha’s intention for [rebirth at] a different time.”

This interpretation should be considered inappropriate. Why? Because whenever a Bodhisattva composes a treatise to clarify a sutra, the aim is consistently to uphold the Buddha’s intended meaning and to align with his sacred intent. It is impossible for a treatise to contradict any sutra.

Now, regarding the interpretation of “the intention for a different time”: the Buddha’s customary approach in expounding teachings is to present the cause first and then its effect, thus ensuring a lucid, well-defined line of reasoning.

The *Contemplation Sutra* merely states that a lifelong transgressor attains rebirth in the Pure Land by completing ten recitations at the time of death, without specifying whether there was a pertinent cause in the past. The World-Honored One’s purpose is to inspire future wrongdoers to abandon evil and turn towards good at life’s end, seeking rebirth through recitation. Hence, the past cause is intentionally omitted. By focusing on the result rather than the cause, the World-Honored One deliberately obscures the initial factors and accentuates the final outcome. This defines the intention for a different time. How do we know? The

very completion of the ten recitations itself implies that there must have been a causative factor in the past.

For illustration, the *Nirvana Sutra* states:

If one has made offerings to as many Buddhas as the grains of sand in half of the Ganges River and has awakened Bodhi-mind, then upon hearing the Mahayana teachings in an unwholesome world, this person can refrain from slander yet not accrue additional merit. If one has made offerings to as many Buddhas as the grains of sand in the entire Ganges and has awakened Bodhi-mind, then upon hearing the Mahayana teachings in an unwholesome world, this person will not only abstain from slander but also embrace the teachings with appreciation and cherishment.

As verified by these sutras, it becomes evident that the completion of ten recitations indeed stems from a past cause. Without such a cause from the past, it would have been impossible even to encounter a Dharma friend, let alone complete the ten recitations.

Regarding the statement in the *Compendium*: “Earning a thousand coins from one cannot be accomplished in a single day,” the intent of the Buddha is to encourage sentient beings to amass a wealth of virtuous causes, thereby facilitating their rebirth through recitation. From the perspective of the *Compendium*’s author, by this statement the past causes are obscured, and this reasoning can also be without fault. Interpreted this way, it conforms to the Buddha’s sutra and aligns with the purport of the *Compendium*, thus the two mutually reinforce each other. The pathway for rebirth is cleared, leaving no room for doubt.

3. Extensive exchange of questions and answers

This section presents extensive questions and answers to dissolve doubts. Below is a broad array of inquiries and responses regarding the *Treatise on the Perfection of Wisdom*.

Question: All sentient beings, throughout countless great *kalpas*, have created all kinds of flawed karma, and are therefore bound to the Three Domains. How can they, without severing such karma that binds them to the Three Domains, achieve rebirth in the Pure Land and escape the Three Domains by merely reciting Amitabha Buddha for a brief period? How then should the term “binding karma” be defined?

Answer: There are two ways of explanation:

1. Refutation on the ground of Dharma principles.
2. Clarification through parables.

With respect to Dharma principles, all Tathagatas possess Inconceivable Wisdom, All-Embracing Mahayana Wisdom, and Unsurpassed Peerless Supreme Wisdom. The power of Inconceivable Wisdom enables them to transform few into many, many into few, near to far, far to near, light to heavy, and heavy to light. They have such wisdom — immeasurable, boundless and beyond comprehension.

There is a second way of explanation, comprising seven parts, each featuring a parable for illustration:

i) Imagine a hundred people who have gathered firewood for a century, piling it to a height of a thousand feet. A spark, barely the size of a bean, ignites it, and within half a day, it is completely consumed. Can anyone claim that firewood collected over a hundred years cannot be exhausted in half a day?

ii) Consider a person with a mobility impairment boarding a boat. By harnessing the power of the wind with sails, he can cover a thousand miles in a single day. It should not be asserted that a cripple is unable to travel a great distance in one day.

iii) Similarly, envision a lowly, impoverished individual who acquires an auspicious object and presents it to the King as a tribute. The King, delighted by this offering, lavishly rewards the presenter. Instantly, a poor person is enveloped in wealth and honor. How can it be argued that “even government officials, who dedicate decades to their service, enduring hardships and navigating the ups and downs, do not attain distinction upon retirement, so the aforesaid sudden prosperity is unfounded”?

iv) Also take the example of a frail man who, with his own physical strength, cannot even mount a donkey. If he travels with a *chakravartin*, he effortlessly soars through the sky. Can it be declared that “because of the weak man’s lack of strength, he surely cannot ascend to the sky”?

v) Observe a thick rope that cannot be pulled apart by a thousand men. Yet it can be swiftly severed by a boy wielding a sword. How can one assert that the strength of a boy is insufficient to cut apart a thick rope?

vi) Think of a toxic-feathered bird entering a river and poisoning

all fish and mussels. When a rhinoceros horn touches the mud, the dead return to life. How can we contend that “once life is terminated, it cannot be restored”?

vii) Likewise, the immortal crane revived Zi’an by calling his name. Can it be maintained that a thousand years of entombment render revival impossible?

Among all dharmas, there exist self-power and other-power, self-reliance and other-reliance, featuring myriad methods of accentuation and obscuration, boundless and without limit. How, then, could we, with minds beset by obstructions, question the teachings that are free of obstruction?

Moreover, among the Five Inconceivables, the Buddha Dharma is the most unfathomable. You presume the karma that binds to the Three Domains to be heavy, and suspect that the brief recitation is too light and insufficient for rebirth in the Land of Peace and Joy and entry into the Assembly of Assured Enlightenment. This viewpoint is mistaken.

Question: A Mahayana sutra states:

The karmic path is like a weighing scale. The heavier karma leads the pull [towards the karmic destination].

Sentient beings have committed every evil throughout their lifetimes, whether spanning a hundred years or ten, up to the present day. How is it that a person who encounters a Dharma friend at life’s end is able to attain rebirth through ten continuous recitations? If this is possible, how can the principle “The heavier karma leads the pull” be credible?

Answer: You mean that the evil karma accumulated throughout a lifetime is heavy, and that the virtuous karma from the “ten recitations” by the person of the lower grade is light. However, the measure should be made according to the true principles: being heavy or light is defined by the state of mind, causal conditions and decisiveness; it doesn’t depend on the length of time.

How is karmic weight decided by the frame of mind? The evildoer himself relied on his own false, perverted views to create the negative karma. But with the Dharma friend’s consolation by skillful means and upon hearing the teaching of absolute reality, he completed the ten recitations. The former pertains to falsity and the latter, the truth. How can the two be comparable? Consider a room that has been dark for a thousand years. If light shines in, even for a short while, the room immediately brightens. How could the darkness refuse to leave, claiming it has occupied the room for a thousand years?

Therefore, the *Kasyapa-parivarta Sutra* says:

The Buddha said to Bodhisattva Kasyapa: “Although sentient beings are immersed in passion and desire, shrouded in negative karma for thousands of billions of kalpas, upon hearing a Buddha sutra and fostering a single thought of virtue, their evil karma is immediately extinguished.”

This is called “decided by the state of mind.”

How is it decided by causal conditions? The evildoer himself relied on his own deluded thoughts to create the negative karma. His victims were sentient beings who also suffered from afflictions and illusory

karmic retributions. But with supreme faith and reliance on Amitabha Tathagata's name, which is truthful, pure and infinitely meritorious, the evildoer completed the ten recitations. This is like a person who has been shot by a poisoned arrow. His tendons and bones are broken. When he hears the beat of a drum coated with antidote, the arrow pops out and the toxin dissipates. Can anyone say that since the arrow is deeply embedded and the poison is severe, hearing the drum cannot remove the arrow and poison? This is called "decided by causal conditions."

How is it determined by decisiveness? The wrongdoer created the negative karma by relying on thoughts that were each followed by a [distracting] thought and interrupted by other miscellaneous ones. But he completed the ten recitations with no subsequent, distracting thoughts. This is called "decisiveness."

Moreover, according to the *Treatise on the Perfection of Wisdom*:

When sentient beings approach life's end, slicing winds dismantle their forms, and the agony of death presses on, engendering immense terror.

Thus, encountering a Dharma friend, developing profound fortitude, and reciting ten times with uninterrupted mindfulness can augment the virtuous roots, leading to the attainment of rebirth.

Consider also someone who confronts an enemy and engages in combat, exhausting every ounce of physical strength in a single moment. The same principle applies to the merit of the ten recitations. Likewise, if one develops a single wrong thought at the time of death, it amplifies his malevolent mind. It's enough to obliterate the blessings of the Three

Domains, and directly drives him into a Wretched Realm.

Question: You have stated that the merit of the ten recitations at the time of death can overturn a lifetime of negative karma, enabling rebirth in the Pure Land. How much time, then, do the ten recitations take?

Answer: As stated in a sutra, [the temporal length of] a hundred times' arising-and-ceasing is one instant, and sixty instants equal the time of one thought. This provides a broad interpretation of "thought" according to scripture. But this time span does not apply to the "[ten] recitations" currently discussed. To recollect either Amitabha Buddha's overall physique or a specific part of it, and contemplate this image for ten thoughts without the interruption of other mental activities, qualifies as ten recitations.

The sutra also states that the term "ten continuous recitations" is merely a numerical expression used by the sacred being (the Buddha). By accumulating recitations with concentrated attention, free from distractions, the reciter accomplishes the karmic path [towards rebirth in the Pure Land]. There is no need to bother with calculating the number of recitations.

The sutra further affirms that experienced practitioners of recitation should mostly follow this principle. For beginners, counting recitations can be beneficial. This guidance is also in accordance with the sacred teachings.

Question: I wish to heed your advice and practice Buddha-invocation samadhi. But I am unclear about the manifestations and features.

Answer: Imagine someone in an empty, secluded area, who encounters a hostile bandit wielding a knife, coming straight to kill him. As he flees, he notices a river ahead. Before he gets to the water, he thinks: “When I reach the bank, should I strip off my clothes to cross, or should I swim while clothed? If I remove them, I worry there won’t be enough time; if I swim with them on, I fear my life will be endangered.” At that moment, his only concern is to find the most convenient way to cross the river, with no other thoughts distracting him.

It is similar with practitioners. Invocation of Amitabha Buddha parallels the man’s focus on crossing the river, where each thought seamlessly transitions to the next, free from distraction by extraneous notions. The invocation can center on the Buddha’s Dharma Body, his divine powers or wisdom, the image of the tuft between his eyebrows, his physical characteristics, or his fundamental vows. Reciting his name is the same. Sustaining exclusivity in uninterrupted continuity guarantees rebirth in the Buddha’s presence.

Future generations of disciples are now advised: To harmonize the Two Truths, simply know that through each invocation nothing is to be attained - this represents the gate of wisdom (the Ultimate Truth). Simultaneously, concentrate on invocation continuously without interruption — this embodies the gate of merit (the Worldly Truth).

Therefore, a sutra says:

Bodhisattvas and Mahasattvas constantly nurture their minds with merit and wisdom.

Beginners are yet unable to penetrate [the illusion of] phenomenal characteristics. As long as they can rely on phenomenal characteristics with unwavering concentration, they will invariably attain rebirth in the Pure Land. Doubt is unnecessary.

Question: The *Longer Sutra of Infinite Life* states:

If sentient beings of the ten directions who earnestly believe and rejoice, wish to be reborn in my land and recite my name, even ten times, should fail to be born there, may I not attain perfect enlightenment.

Now, some people in the world, upon hearing this sacred teaching, decide not to pay attention [to recitation] at all during their lifetime, planning only to practice it at the brink of death. What is to be said about this?

Answer: This approach is misguided. Why? The ten continuous recitations prescribed in the sutra seem not difficult. However, the minds of ordinary beings resemble wild horses. Their consciousness is as restless as monkeys, galloping through the Six Senses without pause. Practitioners must awaken their faith and proactively restrain their thoughts. This allows them to habitualize their recitations so that they become their inherent nature, fortifying their virtuous roots.

As the Buddha explained to the great king, those who have accumulated virtuous deeds will not harbor malevolent thoughts at the approach of death, similar to how a tree falls in the direction it is inclined. When the slicing winds of death's moment arrive, inflicting various sufferings upon the body, how can one manage to recite without a previously established habit of practice?

It is advisable for groups of three to five aspirants to reach an agreement on fundamental principles well in advance. As a member approaches the end of life, the others should take turns guiding him, reciting Amitabha's name on his behalf, and reinforcing his aspiration to rebirth in the Land of Peace and Joy. Their recitation should proceed voice by voice to ensure completion of the ten recitations for rebirth.

It is akin to a wax seal stamping into clay; once the seal dissolves, the inscription is perfected. The moment of death in this place is the time of rebirth in the Land of Peace and Joy. Entering the Assembly of Assured Enlightenment, what concerns could remain? Everyone should consider this unsurpassed benefit. Why not discipline your thoughts during the present lifetime?

Question: The Mahayana scriptures consistently proclaim that “all sentient beings are ultimately without birth, akin to the void.” Why did Bodhisattvas Vasubandhu and Nagarjuna both aspire to rebirth in the Pure Land?

Answer: The statement that “all sentient beings are ultimately without birth, akin to the void” carries two meanings:

1. Ordinary people see “truly existing” sentient beings, “truly existing” births and deaths, and so on. However, from the perspective of Bodhisattvas, rebirth is ultimately like the void, like rabbit's horn.

2. The “birth” discussed here is that which arises from causes and conditions. Since it arises from causes and conditions, the so-called “birth” is merely a borrowed term. Being borrowed-term birth, it signifies non-birth, aligning with the Great Principle. This stands in contrast to the

“truly existing” sentient beings and “truly existing” births and deaths that ordinary people conceive of.

Question: Birth is the fundamental origin of existence and the ultimate source of all suffering. Those who recognize this defect and renounce birth to pursue non-birth may find hope for liberation. Now, you advise seeking rebirth in the Pure Land, which is to forsake birth [in the Three Domains] and pursue birth [in the Pure Land]. How, then, can birth be fully eradicated?

Answer: Rebirth in the Pure Land is a “birthless birth,” relying on the pure original vows of Amitabha Tathagata. It is nothing like the births of sentient beings in the Three Domains, which are tainted by passion, delusion and clinging. Why is that? Because the Dharma-nature is perfectly pure and ultimately birthless. The term “reborn/rebirth” here is used simply to accommodate the standard sentiments of those who seek rebirth [in the Pure Land].

Question: Those who understand the “birthless” birth explained above would be those reborn in the upper tier. But for a person of the lower grade, who seeks rebirth in the Pure Land by dint of the ten recitations, does he not hold to actual birth? If so, he would be faced with two concerns: (1) failure to achieve rebirth in the Pure Land, and (2) merits associated with such phenomenal characteristics could not constitute a cause for [the realization of] non-birth (non-arising).

Answer: There are three points of explanation.

1. Think in terms of a pure *muni*-pearl. When it is placed in filthy water, through the power of the pearl, the water immediately becomes

clear and clean. Consider a person with the immense “filth” of negative karma that would otherwise entrap him in an endless cycle of rebirth. If he hears Amitabha Tathagata’s name — a pearly, supreme name of purity and non-birth — it enters his turbid mind. Thought by thought, his negative karma is extricated and his mind is purified. He will forthwith be reborn in the Pure Land.

2. When that *muni*-pearl is wrapped in a piece of colored silk and dropped in water, the water instantly takes the color of the silk. In the Pure Land, there is an unexcelled “pearl” — Amitabha Tathagata’s name. This pearl is wrapped in a “silk piece” of countless accomplished merits. When it is submerged in the “water” of the reborn being’s mind, why can’t it convert her wrongful belief in [the realness of] birth into the wisdom of non-birth?

3. Another example is to light a fire on an icy surface. The intense flame melts the ice. Once the ice thaws, the fire dies. That person of the lower grade is unaware that the Dharma-nature is birthless. But by relying on the power of Amitabha-recitation, she engages her mind in rebirth [in the Pure Land] and aspires to such rebirth. After she reaches the realm of non-birth, the “fire” of her mistaken belief in [the realness of] birth spontaneously goes out.

Question: By what body is it said that one is reborn in the Pure Land?

Answer: In this world, a borrowed-term “person” practices various paths. Each invocation constitutes the cause of the next one. The borrowed-term “person” in this defiled realm and the borrowed-term “person” in that Pure Land [after his rebirth] are neither entirely identical

nor completely different. Nor is his every thought and subsequent thought. Why is that? If they were entirely identical, causality would not exist. If they were completely different, they would not be in continuation. According to this principle, despite the distinctions in dimension and duration, it is invariably the same practitioner.

Question: If merely reciting the Buddha’s name can eliminate obstacles, then it is akin to a person pointing to the moon with his finger – the finger should be able to remove darkness.

Answer: Phenomena differ in countless ways and should not be covered by the same rule. How so? There are cases where names themselves are the phenomena [they denote]. There are also names that differ from the phenomena [they represent].

The former include the names of Buddhas and Bodhisattvas, spells, [mystical] terms and phrases from the scriptures. For example, *Terms to Cure Swelling* contains incantations, one of which reads *richu dongfang zhachi zhahuang* [“The sun rises in the east, red at first and yellow later.”] Yet, even if the curative spell is cast at dusk or midnight, the patient will also be cured.

Also consider a person bitten by a dog. Applying heat to the wound with a fire-warmed tiger bone can heal the injury. If a tiger bone is not available, rubbing the palm over the wound while calling “Tiger comes, tiger comes” can also initiate recovery.

Another instance involves someone suffering from leg cramps. Pressing a papaya branch heated by fire directly onto the affected area can bring immediate relief. Should a papaya not be on hand, pressing the area

with a warmed palm while chanting “papaya, papaya” also dispels the cramp. I once applied this method, to perfect effect. Why is that? Because those names themselves are the phenomena [they denote].

Names that are different from the phenomena [they represent] are like the finger pointing at the moon.

Question: Merely reciting Amitabha’s name can eliminate the darkness of ignorance for sentient beings of the ten directions, leading to rebirth in the Pure Land. However, there are sentient beings who do recite Amitabha’s name and recollect him but whose ignorance persists. Their wishes are not satisfied. Why is that?

Answer: Because they fail to practice according to ultimate reality and do not correspond to the meaning of the name. What does this mean? It means they do not know that the Tathagata is the “Body of Absolute Reality” and the “Body for the Benefit of Living Beings.”

Furthermore, there are three kinds of non-correspondence:

1. One’s faith is not genuine; it’s sometimes there, sometimes not.
2. One’s faith is not concentrated; it lacks resoluteness.
3. One’s faith is not continuous; it is interrupted by other thoughts.

These kinds of faith are interdependent in reverse order: Continuous faith can lead to concentrated faith; when faith is single-minded, it becomes genuine. Possessing all these three kinds of faith and not achieving rebirth in the Pure Land is simply not possible.



The 3rd Great Teaching

The Third Teaching comprises four sections.

1. Distinctions between the Difficult Path and the Easy Path.

2. Different durations of *kalpas*.

3. Clarification that, for infinite *kalpas*, we have been ensnared in the Five Realms of the Three Domains, driven by positive and negative karma, receiving retributions of joy and suffering, and reincarnating non-stop over countless lifetimes.

4. Invocation of sacred teachings as evidence to motivate future generations to awaken faith and aspire to rebirth in the Pure Land.

1. The Difficult Path and the Easy Path

This section differentiates between the Difficult Path and the Easy Path. It consists of two subsections:

i) Introduction to the two paths.

ii) Questions and answers.

I dwell in the burning realm, which fills me with fear to contemplate. Thanks to the Great Sage's teachings on the Three Vehicles, I find solace and direction. However, the carts of goats and deer (the Sravaka and Pratyekabuddha paths) offer only temporary respite, not the ultimate goal. The Buddha criticizes these paths as misguided attachments, an obstacle to the pursuit of Bodhi. There may be a subsequent transition to Mahayana, but the route is still roundabout.

Directly boarding the Great Vehicle would be an alternative route. I fear that, in my current state of retrogression, the journey ahead would be lengthy and perilous. Without established virtues of my own, advancement will be difficult.

Therefore, Bodhisattva Nagarjuna states:

There are two paths to pursue Non-retrogression (Avaivart): the Difficult Path and the Easy Path.

The "Difficult Path" means that it is hard to pursue Non-retrogression in the world of Five Turbidities, at a time when there is no Buddha. There are many aspects to the difficulty, roughly five. What are they?

1. Non-Buddhist paths appear to be virtuous but sabotage the Bodhisattva teachings;
2. The way of the Sravaka focuses on self-benefit and impedes [the awakening of] Great Compassion;
3. Rogues and villains destroy others' outstanding virtues;

4. The positive fruits in the heavenly and human realms are subversive, undermining the pure practices;

5. Practitioners rely only on self-power and lack support from other-power.

Such things can be seen everywhere. It is like travelling overland on foot — an arduous journey. Therefore, it is called the Difficult Path.

The “Easy Path” signifies that, by believing in Amitabha Buddha and aspiring to be reborn in the Pure Land, one develops faith, establishes virtues, and cultivates all practices. By dint of the Buddha’s vow-power, one will attain rebirth in the Pure Land. There the person will be sustained and supported by Buddha-power and immediately join the Great Vehicle Assembly of Assured Enlightenment. The “Assured Enlightenment” is precisely *Avaivart* – the stage of Non-retrogression. It is like sailing on water, which is joyous. So it is termed the Easy Path.

Question: Bodhi is singular, and thus the cultivation of its causes ought to be non-dual as well. Why is cultivating the causes toward Buddhahood in this world called the Difficult Path, while seeking rebirth in the Pure Land in pursuit of the Great Bodhi termed the Easy Path?

Answer: As expounded in Mahayana sutras, among all practices, there exist self-power, other-power, self-deliverance and other-deliverance.

What is self-power? It can be exemplified by a person who, motivated by fear of birth and death, resolves to pursue enlightenment. He renounces lay life, cultivates meditation and thereby attains supernatural abilities, traveling through the Four Continents. This is known as “self-power.”

What is other-power? Take the example of a frail man who is unable to mount a donkey using his own physical strength. Yet, by following a *chakravartin*, he soars in the sky and travels through the Four Continents. This occurs because he relies on the power of the *chakravartin*, hence the term “other-power.”

The same applies to sentient beings. If one makes resolutions and engages in practices in this world, aspiring to rebirth in the Pure Land, this exemplifies self-power. At the time of a person’s death, Amitabha Tathagata appears with a radiant lotus throne to welcome him and the person is reborn in the Pure Land; this represents other-power.

Therefore, the *Longer Sutra* says:

Human and celestial beings of the ten directions who wish to be reborn in my land all rely on the karmic power of Amitabha Tathagata’s great vows as the augmentative cause.

If this were not so, the 48 Vows would have been made in vain.

Advice to future practitioners: Since other-power is available for you to rely on, do not restrict yourselves and linger in the burning house for nothing.

2. Different durations of *kalpas*

This section clarifies the different durations of *kalpas*. As stated in the *Treatise on the Perfection of Wisdom*:

There are three types of kalpas: small, middle and great.

Imagine a city extending 40 *li* in length, width and height, completely filled with mustard seeds. A celestial being, who lives a very long life, removes one seed every three years. The time it takes to remove all the seeds is known as a small *kalpa*.

Similarly, consider a city 80 *li* in each dimension – also brimming with mustard seeds. The period required to clear all the seeds in the same manner as previously described is defined as a middle *kalpa*.

For a city that spans 120 *li* in every direction, thoroughly filled with mustard seeds, the duration to deplete all the seeds, following the method outlined above, is designated a great *kalpa*.

Alternatively, envision a rock measuring 80 *li* in each dimension. Every three years, a celestial being with a long lifespan gently brushes it once with his heavenly garment, which weighs three *zhu* (an extremely small measure of weight). This action continues until the rock completely vanishes. The time for this process is termed a middle *kalpa*. The time frames for smaller and larger rocks can be inferred by referring to the *kalpas* in the earlier metaphor. Detailed elaboration is unnecessary.

3. Endless transmigrations

This section consists of five subsections.

i) This subsection clarifies that across beginningless *kalpas*, sentient beings have been perpetually transmigrating through *samsara* in this realm, reincarnating with countless bodily existences. As expounded in the *Treatise on the Perfection of Wisdom*:

Within the human realm, a person may pass away in the Zhang family and be reborn in the Wang clan. Taking leave of the Wangs, he may enter life anew in the Li family. In this manner, across the entirety of the Jambudvipa realm, one might be reborn within the same lineage or among various households. Sometimes, a person who dies in Jambudvipa in the south is reborn in Aparagodaniya in the west, and the cycle repeats as in Jambudvipa. This pattern of rebirth extends to the other continents as well.

Similarly, passing from the Four Continents to rebirth in the Heaven of the Four Great Kings adheres to this pattern. From there, beings move to the Heaven of Trayastrimsa and subsequently to the other four superior heavens [of the Desire Realm], all within the same cyclical process. The Form Realm encompasses 18 heavens, and the Formless Realm contains four. Beings transition from death in one realm to rebirth in another, transmigrating through all these heavens in the same manner.

Moreover, one might depart the Form Realm to be reborn in the Avici Hell; from Avici Hell, move to milder hells; then to the animal realm; from the animal realm to the realm of hungry ghosts; and from the realm of hungry ghosts, back to the human or celestial realms.

Thus, beings reincarnate through the Six Realms, enduring the retributions of suffering and joy within the endless cycle of birth and death. This applies not only to beings born from wombs, but also to those arising through the other three modes of birth.

Therefore, the *Saddharma-smṛty-upasthāna Sūtra* (*Sūtra on Mindfulness of the Correct Dharma*) states:

**Through myriad lives, beings transmigrate,
Chasing joy and idling, Path not to cultivate.
Unaware, as their store of merit dwindles,
They fall into Wretched Realms, suffering woes' swindles.**

And the *Nirvana Sūtra* says:

**This body, a vessel of sufferings amassed,
Is impure through, with no part bypassed.
Constraints, abscesses and ailments abound,
Delving into its core, no worth is found.
Even bodies in the celestial domains
Share this truth, being all the same.**

The sutra further declares:

Practice non-indulgence. Why? Because indulgence is the root of all misdeeds, while non-indulgence is the fountainhead of all virtues. Like the brilliance of the sun and moon, the most luminous among all lights, so too is the practice of non-indulgence – it stands supreme among all virtuous dharmas. Just as Mt. Sumeru surpasses all other mountains in height, non-indulgence similarly exceeds all virtuous dharmas in superiority. Why is that? All unwholesome dharmas stem from indulgence, whereas all virtuous dharmas originate in non-indulgence.

ii) On the number of bodily existences undergone in one *kalpa*.

Question: Although it is said that transmigration in the Six Realms has been boundless over beginningless *kalpas*, how many bodily existences must one assume within a single *kalpa* to be considered transmigration?

Answer: As the Nirvana Sutra says:

Take all the grass and plants in the three-thousand-fold great chiliocosm, cut them into four-inch pieces, and all use those pieces to count the parents of the bodily existences one assumes during a kalpa. Even then, the count would not be complete.

The sutra also declares:

The amount of mother's milk one consumes in a kalpa exceeds the waters of the Four Great Oceans.

It further proclaims:

The bones from one's bodies accumulated over one kalpa reach the height of Mt. Vipula.

Thus, through countless *kalpas*, we have undergone birth and death to no avail. To this day, we remain as ordinary beings. Have we ever reflected upon this? It is truly saddening and lamentable!

iii) Citation of scriptures as evidence.

Question: Given the statement that beings have assumed countless bodily existences over vast *kalpas*, is this a general assertion made solely to provoke a sense of revulsion towards samsara, or is it also substantiated by scriptural evidence?

Answer: This is all based on explicit texts from sacred teachings. Which ones? As stated in the *Lotus Sutra*:

In the distant past, inexpressibly remote great kalpas ago, a Buddha named Tathagata Mahabhijna Jnanabhibhu (Great Power and Transcendent Knowledge) appeared in the world. Sixteen princes ascended Dharma thrones to enlighten sentient beings. Each converted as many beings as six million billion nayutas of the grains of sand in the Ganges River. Since the Buddha's Parinirvana, an immensely long period has elapsed, beyond any possible calculation.

How is this? The sutra explains:

Take all the earth from the three-fold great chiliocosm and grind it into ink. The Buddha says, each time this person passes a thousand lands, he drops an ink dot the size of a dust particle. This continues until all the ink is dispersed across the ground. The Buddha says, if all the lands the person has passed, both dotted and undotted, are reduced to dust, and each dust particle represents a kalpa, then the time elapsed since that Buddha's Parinirvana exceeds the total number of such kalpas. The sentient beings present today were those who, at that time, received teachings under the thrones of the sixteen princes.

Therefore, the sutra continues:

Due to these original causes and conditions, I expound the Lotus Sutra.

The *Nirvana Sutra* further declares:

One was a prince, and the other was a person of humble means. These two mutually interacted.

The one referred to as the prince is the current Tathagata Shakyamuni, who was the sixteenth prince in the previous time. The one referred to as the person of humble means represents sentient beings today.

iv) Frequent rebirth into bodily existences in the Three Wretched Realms.

Question: These sentient beings have been described as transmigrating through numerous *kalpas*. In which of the Three Domains do they most often take rebirth?

Answer: Although described as “transmigrating,” they predominantly take rebirth within the Three Wretched Realms. As stated in a sutra:

In space, define a plane area with a circumference of eight cubits. Within this area, extending from Earth up to Akanishtha Heaven, the total number of visible beings already exceeds that of the humans and celestials combined in the three-fold great chiliocosm.

We thus know that more beings take rebirth in the Three Wretched Realms.

Why is that? Because negative karma arises easily, while cultivating a virtuous mind is difficult. Observe the current beings: Upon acquiring wealth and status, they solely engage in indulgence and violate precepts. In the heavens, most celestial beings are preoccupied with pleasure.

Thus a sutra says:

Sentient beings transmigrate in this manner, with the Three Wretched Realms as their perpetual home. Temporary residences before swift departure, the human and celestial abodes are hence termed guesthouses.

The *Treatise on Great Adornment* recommends that all sentient beings constantly constrain their thoughts and maintain correct mindfulness. Its *Gatha* states:

***In life's prime, untouched by sickness,
Indulgence reigns and diligence is lacking.
As worldly affairs seize every thought,
Giving, precepts and meditation are neglected.***

***Only with death's approach does remorse awaken
And virtuous practice begin.
The wise should view things clearly,
And sever ties to the five desires.***

***Those cultivating the mind diligently
Feel no regret at life's end.
With a keen mind and sharp focus,
Chaotic thoughts do not arise.***

***The wise sincerely focus their minds,
Which do not stray as death approaches.
For those who lack practice and concentration,
Life's end brings only chaos and confusion.***

***When the mind is chaos prone,
It's like taming horses with a millstone.
In battle, when advance is due,
They circle and fail to follow through.***

v) Reasons for transmigration through countless *kalpas*.

Question: All sentient beings possess Buddha-nature. They should have encountered numerous Buddhas over countless *kalpas*. Why are they still reincarnating in the cycle of birth and death, unable to escape the burning house?

Answer: According to the sacred Mahayana teachings, one remains in the burning house because of failure to attain either of the two supreme approaches to overcoming the cycle of birth and death. What are these two? One is the Sacred Path, and the other is rebirth in the Pure Land.

The Sacred Path, one of the two approaches, is difficult to realize in this age. Firstly, because we are far removed from the era of the Great Sage. Secondly, due to the profoundness of the Dharma-principle and the limitations of our comprehension. Hence, the *Moon Store Sutra in the Great Compilation* states:

In the Age of Dharma Decline, billions and billions of sentient beings will engage in the practice of the Way, yet not one will attain it.

During the current Age of Dharma Decline, and in this unwholesome world of the Five Turbidities, only the path of the Pure Land provides a clear route to the gateway of enlightenment. Therefore, the *Longer Sutra* says:

Should sentient beings, even if they have done evil all their lives, recite my name continuously ten times as death approaches and fail to be born [in the Pure Land], may I not attain perfect enlightenment.

Moreover, all sentient beings do not recognize their own limitations:

In the context of Mahayana, the True Suchness, the Ultimate Reality and the First-Principle Emptiness have never been within the reach of the mind.

As for the Lesser Vehicle (Theravada), whether it be entering the stages of Seeing the Truth and Practicing the Path, achieving the states of Anagami and Arhat, eliminating the five lower fetters, or renouncing the five higher ones, neither monastics nor lay practitioners have yet succeeded.

Even if there are karmic rewards pertinent to the human and celestial realms, they result solely from observing the Five Precepts and undertaking the Ten Good Actions. However, those who successfully uphold these are exceedingly rare.

When it comes to engaging in malevolence and committing transgressions, how are they different from a violent storm?

Thus, out of Great Compassion, all Buddhas recommend seeking rebirth in the Pure Land. Even if one has engaged in unwholesome actions throughout life, dedicating his focus and continually reciting the name of Amitabha Buddha will naturally dissolve all obstacles, ensuring his rebirth in the Pure Land. Why not contemplate this? What holds you back from aspiring to that destination?

4. Citations from scriptures to awaken faith

This section references the sacred teachings as evidence to encourage the awakening of faith and the pursuit of rebirth in the Pure Land.

The *Sutra on Buddha-Contemplation Samadhi* states:

At that time, Bodhisattva Foremost Wealth in the assembly addressed the Buddha: “World-Honored One, I remember countless kalpas ago, a Buddha also named Shakyamuni appeared in the world. After his Parinirvana, there was a prince known as Gold Banner. He was arrogant, held incorrect views, and lacked faith in the Correct Dharma.

A teacher-bhikku, Samadhi Freedom, told the prince: ‘In the world, there are Buddha statues of extraordinary loveliness. Let us enter the pagoda for a moment to behold the Buddha’s image.’ Heeding this virtuous friend’s suggestion, the prince went into the pagoda to view the statue. Upon seeing its majestic form, he commented to the bhikku: ‘The Buddha statue is dignified and resplendent; even more, imagine the true body of the Buddha!’ The bhikku recommended: ‘Prince, if you find yourself unable to pay homage to the Buddha statue before you now, simply utter: ‘Namo Buddha.’”

Upon returning to his palace, the prince continually thought of the statue in the pagoda. Late that night, in a dream, he beheld

the Buddha's image, experiencing profound joy in his heart. Subsequently, he renounced his wrongful views and sought refuge in the Three Gems.

After the end of that life, due to the merit accrued from entering the pagoda and reciting 'Namo Buddha,' he encountered ninety billion nayuta Buddhas. In the presence of these Buddhas, he diligently pursued his practice, consistently achieving the profound Buddha-invocation samadhi. By the power of this samadhi, all Buddhas appeared before him, each bestowing predictions of his enlightenment. Since then, over a million asamkhyeya kalpas, he never descended into the Wretched Realms and has, to this day, attained the Shurangama Samadhi. The prince of the previous time is none other than myself, Foremost Wealth."

At that time in the assembly, innumerable Mahasattvas from the ten directions shared their original causal circumstances from past lives, all having achieved their fruitions through Buddha-invocation.

The Buddha said to Ananda: "This Buddha-contemplation samadhi is the medicine for all beings who have committed transgressions, a protector for precept breakers, a guide for the strayed, sight for the blind, wisdom for the unwise, and light for those in darkness. It is the valiant leader in the battle against afflictions, an effortless play of all Buddhas, World-Honored Ones, and the origin of all great samadhis, including the Shurangama Samadhi."

The Buddha instructed Ananda: “You must now hold on to this and be cautious not to forget it. Buddhas of the past, present and future all teach this same Buddha-invocation samadhi. I, along with the Buddhas of the ten directions and the thousand Buddhas of this Auspicious Kalpa, have relied on the power of Buddha-invocation samadhi from the moment we first awakened the Bodhi-mind. Through this, we have attained All-Inclusive Wisdom.”

Moreover, as stated in the *Sutra on Questions of Moggallana*:

The Buddha explained to Moggallana: “Imagine ten thousand rivers flowing long distances, carrying drifts of weeds and tree limbs. The floats in the front and those behind cannot see each other, yet all eventually merge into the great ocean. Similarly, in the world, though the wealthy and noble enjoy riches, pleasure and freedom, none can evade birth, aging, sickness and death. Due to their disbelief in the teachings of the Buddha, when reborn as humans in future lives, they will endure even greater adversities, failing to be reborn in the lands of the thousand Buddhas.

Therefore, I said that the Land of the Infinite Life Buddha is readily accessible and within easy reach. Yet people do not practice for rebirth there, opting instead for the ninety-five misguided paths. I thus name them the eyeless and the earless.

Given these teachings of the scriptures, why not forsake the difficult and embrace the Easy Path?



Second Fascicle

The 4th Great Teaching

The Fourth Teaching comprises three sections:

1. The Indian Tripitaka Master (Bodhiruci), together with venerable masters of this land (China), has meticulously examined the sacred teachings and expressed admiration and aspiration for the Pure Land. It is advisable to follow their lead.

2. Based on the essence of this sutra (the *Contemplation Sutra*), along with other Mahayana scriptures, Buddha-invocation samadhi is specifically emphasized as the cardinal path for both sacred and ordinary beings to pursue and enter.

3. Questions and answers are presented to demonstrate that practitioners of Buddha-invocation attain various inconceivable functions and benefits.

1. Activities by masters advocating Buddha-invocation

This section introduces the activities of the Indian and Chinese masters.

Blindfolded by the five hindrances as if facing a wall, how could I readily be presumptuous? Yet, through journeys and detailed examination, I have respectfully traced a lineage of teachers.

Who are they? The list includes:

- Venerable Bodhiruci from India, a Tripitaka master of Mahayana;
- Master Huichong, a venerable sage, who criticized and renounced fame and wealth;
- Master Daochang, another esteemed sage, whose regular discourses consistently attracted sacred monastics to come and listen;
- Venerable Tanluan, a revered master celebrated for his discreet brilliance and solitary dedication, earning admiration across two nations;
- Venerable Dahai, a Ch’an master, who displayed unparalleled excellence in meditative contemplation;
- Master Shangtong of the Qi Dynasty, who demonstrated superb intellect and strict observance of precepts.

The aforementioned six paragons each stand as a “divine mirror” of the Two Truths. They are exemplars of the fundamental principles of the Buddha Dharma. Their resolve and actions are outstanding, distinguishing them as exceptional throughout history. They all have rigorously studied the Mahayana teachings and have acclaimed rebirth in the Pure Land as the paramount path of importance.

Question: Since it is said they acclaimed rebirth in the Pure Land as the cardinal path, did these virtuous figures exhibit any miraculous signs at the time of their passing?

Answer: Yes, indeed, there were such signs. Consider the example of Master Tanluan, who devoted himself to the practice of the Pure Land teachings throughout his life. At times, worldly gentlemen came to confront him with criticisms such as: “All Buddha Lands in the ten directions are pure realms. Why do you solely concentrate on the West? Does this not generate a bias?”

To this, Master Tanluan responded: “As I am but an ordinary person, my wisdom is superficial and limited. Not having attained any sacred stage, I must keep my mental strength concentrated. It is akin to placing grass in a manger to draw and maintain the cattle’s focus. How could they be allowed to roam freely without a destination?”

Despite facing numerous criticisms, Master Tanluan remained unwavering. Thus all who met him, even just once, whether monastics or laypersons, were either encouraged to awaken to the correct faith if they had not already done so, or inspired to pursue rebirth in the Pure Land if they already possessed such faith.

As Master Tanluan approached the end of his life, monks and laypeople around the temple observed [auspicious phenomena such as] banners and flowers shining upon the courtyard, a mysterious fragrance enveloping the area, and [celestial] music heralding his welcome. It was then that he made his departure to the Pure Land.

Similarly, the other masters also displayed auspicious signs at the end of their lives. The details of the extraordinary manifestations upon their rebirths are indeed beyond comprehension.

2. “Buddha-invocation” emphasized in various scriptures

This section clarifies that both this sutra (the *Contemplation Sutra*) and numerous other texts established Buddha-invocation samadhi as their core essence. It is organized into eight subsections: the first two focus on single-feature samadhi, while the remaining six delve into Buddha-invocation samadhi, examining it through diverse causal conditions and phenomenal manifestations.

i) According to the *Flower Hand Sutra*:

The Buddha told Bodhisattva Firm Will: “There are two kinds of samadhi: single-feature samadhi and multi-feature samadhi. In single-feature samadhi, a Bodhisattva, upon hearing that a Tathagata is presently expounding the Dharma in his world, visualizes this Buddha’s image before him – whether seated in the teaching assembly or turning the Dharma-wheel, surrounded by a multitude of followers.

Upon envisioning such an image, the Bodhisattva restrains all sensory faculties to prevent the mind from wandering, concentrating intently on invoking that single Buddha without

relinquishing this focus. Through this practice, the Bodhisattva realizes the non-characteristic essence underlying the features of both the Buddha and the world. Consistently contemplating and practicing in this manner, the Bodhisattva never deviates from this object of contemplation.

At that moment, the image of the Buddha appears before the Bodhisattva to expound the Dharma for him. Filled with deep respect, the Bodhisattva listens and embraces the teachings, whether profound or basic, thereby intensifying his reverence.

Abiding in this samadhi, the Bodhisattva learns that all phenomena are subject to the dissolution of their features. Upon hearing this, he embraces and memorizes the teaching. Emerging from the samadhi, he is then able to expound this Dharma to the four groups of disciples.” The Buddha told Firm Will: “This is termed the Bodhisattva’s entrance into the gateway of one-feature samadhi.”

ii) The *Manjusri Prajna Sutra* elaborates on single-practice samadhi, stating:

At that time, Manjusri addressed the Buddha: “World-Honored One, how is single-practice samadhi defined?”

The Buddha replied: “Single-practice samadhi occurs when good men and women, in empty, quiet places, cast aside all scattered thoughts, and face the direction of a Buddha with an upright posture. Rather than envisioning any physical appearance, they focus entirely on this single Buddha, reciting the Buddha’s name

exclusively without cease. In such recitation, they can see the Buddhas of the past, present and future. Why is this? The merit and virtue of reciting the name of one Buddha are infinite and limitless, no different from those of reciting countless Buddhas. This is known as Bodhisattvas' single-practice samadhi."

iii) In the *Nirvana Sutra*, the Buddha explains:

If a person, with utter sincerity, consistently cultivates Buddha-invocation samadhi, all Buddhas from the ten directions will perpetually perceive this person, as if physically present before the individual.

Therefore, the *Nirvana Sutra* states:

The Buddha told Bodhisattva Kasyapa: "If good men and women, with utter sincerity, consistently invoke a Buddha exclusively, whether in mountains, forests, towns or villages, by day or by night, sitting or lying down, all Buddhas, World Honored Ones, will constantly perceive those persons, as if physically present before their eyes, perpetually accompanying them and accepting their offerings."

iv) According to the *Contemplation Sutra* and other scriptures, all myriad virtuous practices, if accompanied by the dedication of merit with the aspiration for rebirth in the Pure Land, invariably lead to such rebirth. However, the practice of Buddha-recitation is considered the essential path. Why is that? Because an examination of the sacred teachings reveals two types of benefits: the initial and the ultimate.

If the aim is to cultivate good karma and engage in virtuous practices, then all Paramitas are encompassed in Buddha-recitation. If the goal is to eradicate negative karma and dispel misfortune, it universally removes all hindrances. Hence, the *Contemplation Sutra* further states:

Sentient beings who recite Amitabha’s name are always embraced, never abandoned. Upon death, they are assured of rebirth [in the Pure Land].

This is termed the “initial benefit.”

The “ultimate benefit” is described in the *Sutra of Avalokitesvara’s Prophecies*:

Amitabha Buddha possesses a long, enduring presence that spans countless kalpas, yet he too will enter Parinirvana. During his Parinirvana, only Avalokitesvara and Mahasthamaprapta will remain to preside over the Land of Peace and Joy, welcoming and guiding sentient beings from the ten directions. The duration of the Buddha’s Parinirvana equals the time of his appearance in his land.

During that period, sentient beings in that land will not see the Buddha, except for those who have attained rebirth there through consistent, exclusive recitation of Amitabha’s name. These beings will constantly behold Amitabha, always present without extinction.

This represents the ultimate benefit.

While other practices, when dedicated to rebirth in the Pure Land, all lead to such rebirth, following the Parinirvana of that World-Honored One, some will be able to see him, while others will not. Future generations are advised to contemplate this thoughtfully, to ensure they attain the ultimate benefit.

v) The *Pratyutpanna Sutra* recounts:

At that time, Bodhisattva Bhadravala in this world learned of Amitabha Buddha. He consistently focused his mind on him, and through this mindfulness, he beheld the Buddha. Upon seeing the Buddha, he inquired about the practice that could lead to rebirth in the Pure Land. Amitabha Buddha responded: “Those who wish to be reborn in my land should consistently recite my name without interruption. By doing so, they will secure rebirth in my land. They should contemplate my Buddha body, endowed with the 32 physical marks, radiating light throughout, and unmatched in majesty.”

vi) The *Treatise on the Perfection of Wisdom* offers three explanations.

1. Buddhas are the supreme Dharma Kings, and Bodhisattvas serve as ministers of the Dharma. The sole objects of their veneration and esteem are the Buddhas, the World-Honored Ones. Therefore, one should constantly invoke the Buddhas.

2. Certain Bodhisattvas reflect inwardly: “Over countless *kalpas*, the World-Honored Ones have continuously fostered my Dharma Body, Wisdom Body, and Great-Compassion Body. My samadhi, wisdom and

infinite practices and vows have all been accomplished thanks to the Buddhas. To repay their benevolence, I shall constantly vow to be near the Buddhas, like a minister who, favored by his king, continuously keeps the lord in mind.”

3. Some Bodhisattvas further reflect: “In the causal ground, I encountered a malevolent teacher leading me to slander prajna and fall into the Wretched Realms for countless *kalpas*. Although I pursued other practices, I could not achieve liberation. Later, relying on a virtuous Dharma mentor, who instructed me to practice Buddha-invocation samadhi, I was able to dispel all hindrances and finally attain liberation. Given such profound benefits, I vow never to depart from Buddhas.”

vii) The *Avatamsaka Sutra* states:

***Across vast and immeasurable kalpas,
I bore each and every pain.
Never did I stray from the Tathagatas,
Or failed to witness their unconstrained power.***

The sutra also says:

***Through invocation samadhi I will surely see the Buddha,
Reborn before him upon life’s end.
Urge those near death to recite the Buddha’s name,
Show them a sacred image to inspire their reverence.***

Further, the sutra states:

***Sudhana, during his visit to Dharma mentors, reached the abode
of Bhikku Meritorious Cloud and asked: “Great Master, how***

should one cultivate the Bodhisattva path and adhere to the practices of Samantabhadra?”

At that time, the Bhikku replied to Sudhana: “In the vast ocean of the World-Honored Ones’ wisdom, I know only one method, called the path of Buddha-invocation samadhi. What is it? Within this samadhi, one can see all Buddhas and their kinsfolk, as well as their magnificent, pure Buddha Lands. It enables sentient beings to steer clear of perverse thoughts.

Buddha-invocation samadhi allows a practitioner to perceive, within the subtle realms, the domains of absolute freedom of all Buddhas, guaranteeing the attainment of non-perversion through countless kalpas. This samadhi brings forth all Buddha abodes, impervious to destruction, facilitating a universal vision of all Buddhas and maintaining non-perversion across the three time frames.”

Then Bhikku Meritorious Cloud said to Sudhana: “The Buddha Dharma is a profound ocean, vast and boundless. What I have grasped is solely this path of Buddha-invocation samadhi. Other wondrous realms exceed numeration and remain beyond my knowledge.”

viii) According to the *Sutra on the Ocean Dragon King*:

At that moment, the Sea Dragon King inquired of the Buddha: “World-Honored One, as a disciple seeking to be reborn in Amitabha Buddha’s Land, what practices should I undertake to achieve rebirth in that realm?”

The Buddha replied to the Dragon King: “Those who wish to be reborn in that realm ought to adhere to eight practices. What are these eight? They are:

- 1. Constantly invoking the Buddhas.**
- 2. Presenting offerings to the Tathagatas.**
- 3. Extolling the World-Honored Ones.**
- 4. Crafting images of the Buddhas and cultivating virtues.**
- 5. Dedicating merits towards rebirth in that land.**
- 6. Sustaining an unyielding and robust heart.**
- 7. Progressing with steadfast diligence.**
- 8. Pursuing the authentic wisdom of the Buddhas.”**

The Buddha told the Dragon King: “All sentient beings practicing these eight methods will never be apart from the Buddhas.”

Question: Without fully practicing all the eight methods, can one still be reborn before a Buddha and remain not separate from the Buddhas?

Answer: Certainly, one can be reborn there without doubt. How do we know? When the Buddha spoke the *Jewel Cloud Sutra*, he stated that fulfilling ten practices leads to rebirth in the Pure Land and ensures one is never apart from the Buddhas. At that time, Bodhisattva Sarvanivaranaviskambini asked the Buddha:

If not all the ten practices are perfected, will rebirth still be attained?

The Buddha responded:

Yes, rebirth will be attained. If among the ten practices, one is perfectly completed without deficiency, the remaining nine are all considered pure. Do not doubt this.

The *Sutra on the King of the Mahadruma Kinnaras* states:

Bodhisattvas who practice four methods will never depart from the presence of Buddhas. What are these four? They are:

- 1. Cultivating virtuous practices personally and encouraging all other sentient beings also to aspire to rebirth, so as to behold Tathagatas.***
- 2. Motivating both themselves and others to delight in hearing the correct Dharma.***
- 3. Stimulating both themselves and others to awaken the Bodhi-mind.***
- 4. Practicing Buddha-invocation samadhi persistently and single-mindedly.***

By accomplishing these four practices, wherever they are reborn, they will always be in the presence of Buddhas, never separating from them.

The sutra also states:

The Buddha expounds the Bodhisattva practices, detailing thirty-two means. What are these? Generosity is the means to great wealth; forbearance, the means to a noble demeanor; adherence to precepts, the means to a hallowed physique. The five transgressions and lack of filial piety are the means leading to [the hellish punishments of] blade mountains, sword forests and boiling cauldrons. Developing Bodhi-mind is the means to Buddhahood. Persistent Buddha-invocation and rebirth in the Pure Land are the means for beholding Buddhas.

Only six are briefly listed here, with the rest not elaborated upon.

Given this sacred teaching, why should practitioners not constantly invoke Amitabha Buddha if they aspire to rebirth in the Pure Land!

Further, the *Moonlamp Samadhi Sutra* states:

***Recollecting the Buddha's features and virtues,
All sense faculties are calmed and subdued.
The mind is unclouded, in the Dharma's fusion,
Gaining lore and wisdom, vast as the ocean.***

***Within this samadhi, the wise serenely reside,
All thoughts restrained, striding in the meditation site.
They see Tathagatas, hundreds of billions in number,
And meet myriad Buddhas, like sands of the Ganges River.***

3. Benefits of Buddha-invocation samadhi

This section, through questions and answers, demonstrates the various benefits of Buddha-invocation samadhi, and is divided into five subsections.

Question: Now that constant practice of Buddha-invocation samadhi is recommended, does this exclude the practice of other samadhis?

Answer: The emphasis on constant invocation does not mean to exclude the practice of other samadhis; it simply indicates that Buddha-invocation samadhi is practiced more frequently. Therefore, it is described as “constant.” This does not imply that other samadhis are entirely neglected.

Question: Given the recommendation to practice Buddha-invocation samadhi constantly, is there a hierarchical difference between it and other samadhis?

Answer: The superlative attributes of Buddha-invocation samadhi are unfathomable. How do we know? As stated in Mahayana teachings (in the *Treatise on the Perfection of Wisdom*):

All other samadhis are indeed samadhis. Why [then is Buddha-invocation samadhi supreme]? Because some samadhis may only remove greed, and not address anger or ignorance; others may dispel anger but not ignorance or greed; still others may eliminate ignorance but leave greed and anger untouched. Some samadhis may only clear present obstacles, failing to deal with those from the

past and future. Through constant practice of Buddha-invocation samadhi, all obstacles, whether present, past or future, are eradicated.

Question: Given that Buddha-invocation samadhi can remove obstacles, bring blessings and produce great benefits, can it also provide practitioners with nourishment and prolong their lives?

Answer: Certainly. Why is that? The *Sutra on Sole Practice of Samadhi* says:

There were two brothers; the elder believed in karma, while the younger did not. The younger brother, skilled in physiognomy, saw in his reflection the sign of impending death, indicating he had no more than seven days to live.

A wise person then advised him to seek guidance from the Buddha. The Buddha responded: “The seven-day prediction is accurate. If you single-mindedly invoke the Buddha and observe precepts, there might be an opportunity to overcome this adversity.” Following this advice, he invoked the Buddha with focused devotion.

On the sixth day, two demons came to take him. When they heard his reciting voice, they could not proceed. They returned and reported to King Yama, who then altered the decree of death: “Due to the virtue of observing precepts and invoking the Buddha, [he is] to be reborn in the Third Yama Heaven.”

Moreover, the *Sutra of Parables* recounts the story of an elder who disbelieved in karmic retribution and reward. Having reached the age of fifty, he one night dreamed of a rakshasa (demon) presenting a death decree, intending to claim his life within ten days. Upon waking, he was seized with an overwhelming terror.

At daybreak, he sought a diviner to interpret his dream. The diviner, after casting a hexagram, foretold: “A rakshasa will certainly take your life within ten days.” Struck by fear, the elder turned to the Buddha for guidance. The Buddha advised: “To evade this peril, from this day forward, concentrate on Buddha-invocation, observe the precepts, burn incense, light lamps, hang silk banners and canopies, and cultivate faith in the Three Gems. This will protect you from death.” He promptly adopted this guidance with unwavering faith and dedication.

As the rakshasa reached the elder’s doorstep and saw him cultivating virtuous deeds, it found itself unable to harm him and swiftly withdrew. Thanks to these virtuous deeds, the man lived to the age of one hundred and, upon his passing, was reborn in heaven.

There was another elder, named “Steadfast Observing,” who renounced his precept-vows and returned them to the Buddha. Immediately, he was assaulted by a malevolent demon.

Question: Does Buddha-invocation samadhi merely eliminate obstacles and confer worldly benefits, or does it also evoke the distant realization of supreme Bodhi, transcending the mundane?

Answer: Indeed, it does. Why is this so? In the “Chapter on the Ten Stages,” *Avatamsaka Sutra*, for each Bodhisattva stage from the first

through the tenth, the sutra elaborates on the augmentative practices upon entering the stage, the virtues and benefits achieved upon fulfillment of the stage, and [the principle of] non-abiding in the path [thereby facilitating advancement to the subsequent stage]. The discussion of each stage consistently concludes with:

Although these Bodhisattvas engage in other practices, they never forsake invocation of the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha, nor the offering of the most sublime and splendid tributes to the Three Gems.

This scriptural evidence reveals that all Bodhisattvas, up to those of the higher stages, constantly cultivate invocation of the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha. Through this, they are able to accomplish boundless practices and vows, completing the vast sea of merit and virtue. How much more so should practitioners of the Two Vehicles and ordinary beings, who aspire to rebirth in the Pure Land, practice Buddha-invocation? Why is this the case? Because Buddha-invocation samadhi encompasses all aspects of the Four Samgrahas (Means of Embrace) and the Six Paramitas, serving as the universal approach, accompanying all other practices.

Question: Bodhisattvas above the initial stage have attained realization of the principle of True Suchness equally with Buddhas, and are therefore termed as being born into the Buddhas' family. They are capable of independently achieving Buddhahood and delivering sentient beings. Why then do they still have to pursue Buddha-invocation samadhi and aspire to see Buddhas?

Answer: True Suchness is immense and boundless, equivalent to the expanse of the void, making its magnitude difficult to conceive. Picture a vast, dark chamber. Igniting one or two lamps disperses some light, yet the area remains dim. As more lamps are lit, the space becomes noticeably brighter, but how can this illumination compare with the brilliance of sunlight? The wisdom that Bodhisattvas realize, though it progresses through stages, cannot rival the Buddhas' wisdom, which shines with the radiance of the sun.

The 5th Great Teaching

The Fifth Teaching comprises four sections:

1. Brief overview of variations in practice durations, aimed at hastening the attainment of Non-retrogression.
2. Comparison of meditative contemplation in this world with that in the Pure Land, with encouragement to pursue rebirth in the latter.
3. Contrast between the defiled environment of this world and the pure environment of the Land of Bliss, also distinguished as the flawed versus the flawless.
4. Citation of sacred teachings as evidence to inspire faith among future generations and encourage their pursuit of rebirth in the Pure Land.

1. Variations in practice durations

This section briefly outlines the variations in the durations of practice. It has two subsections:

1. Variations in practice durations.

2. Questions and answers.

i) This subsection clarifies the variations in practice durations. Universally, sentient beings detest suffering and yearn for joy; they dread entanglement and seek liberation. To achieve supreme Bodhi rapidly, awakening Bodhi-mind is the critical first step. This mind is difficult to recognize and activate. Even if it is initiated, scriptures indicate that ten practices must still be pursued: faith, diligence, mindfulness, precepts, meditation, wisdom, renunciation, safeguarding the Dharma, vow formation, and merit dedication. All of these converge on the path towards Bodhi.

However, one must maintain a continuous, uninterrupted physical existence dedicated to cultivation of the Path for 10,000 *kalpas* to achieve the stage of Non-retrogression. Present-day sentient beings are described as “fickle in faith and thought, as light as a feather.” They are also referred to as “[Bodhisattvas] in name only,” “the assembly of uncertain enlightenment,” and “external ordinary beings.” They have yet to escape the burning house. How do we know? According to the *Bodhisattva Necklace Sutra*, which comprehensively delineates the stages of practice for entering the Path, this understanding unfolds naturally. Thus it is called the Difficult Path.

Moreover, even within a single *kalpa*, the bodily existences assumed and the births and deaths undergone are incalculable and inconceivable. How much more so across 10,000 *kalpas*, where one endures pain and burning needlessly?

If sentient beings firmly believe in the Buddhist sutras and aspire to rebirth in the Pure Land, they will, regardless of their lifespan, instantly

arrive there upon death, attaining the stage of Non-retrogression. This accomplishment is equivalent to the merit of 10,000 *kalpas* of practice in this world. Why, then, do the Buddha's disciples not reflect on this? Why not forsake the difficult for the easy?

The *Abhidharmakosa* also elucidates the two types of paths: the Difficult Path and the Easy Path. Regarding the Difficult Path, it states:

To perfect a single stage, it is required that, in each kalpa throughout three great asamkhyeya-kalpas, one must consistently maintain reserves of merit and wisdom, fulfill the Six Paramitas, and complete all other practices. Each practice encompasses millions of difficult approaches.

This defines the Difficult Path.

As for the Easy Path, the text says:

If there is an alternative expedient means that leads to liberation, that is called the Easy Path.

Now, since seeking rebirth in the Land of Bliss is encouraged, all practices should be dedicated towards this aim. With unwavering devotion, rebirth there at life's end is assured. Rebirth in that land embodies the ultimate purity and serenity. How could it not be deemed the Easy Path? Understanding this matter is essential.

Question: Are there sacred teachings substantiating the assertion that those who aspire to rebirth in the Pure Land will attain it when their lives end?

Answer: Here are seven examples, each providing scriptural references to corroborate the statement.

1. The *Longer Sutra* states:

The Buddha told Ananda: “Sentient beings who wish to behold the Buddha of Infinite Life in their current lifetime should awaken the supreme Bodhi-mind, cultivate merit and virtue, and aspire to be reborn in that land. They will then achieve rebirth.”

Therefore, *In Praise of the Longer Sutra* says:

***Upon hearing the virtuous name of Amitabha,
Rejoice, praise, revere, take refuge in the Buddha.
A single recitation brings vast, immense benefit,
Securing fully the treasure of great merit.***

***Even if the great chiliocosm were aflame,
One should pass through to hear the Buddha’s name.
Upon hearing Amitabha, there’s no turning away,
With utmost heart, in reverence I bow and pray.***

2. According to the *Contemplation Sutra*, within the Nine Levels, it is invariably stated for each level that one attains rebirth with correct mindfulness at the time of death.

3. The *Treatise on the Awakening of Faith* says:

Sentient beings are instructed to contemplate True Suchness as universally equal and as the singular reality. Additionally, there are Bodhisattvas who have recently awakened their Bodhi-mind but

whose resolve is still tender and vulnerable. Convinced that they cannot regularly be in the presence of Buddhas to directly serve and make offerings, they are inclined to recede in their pursuit of enlightenment.

We should know that Tathagatas possess supreme skillful means to nurture and safeguard faith. Specifically, through the causal condition of single-minded Buddha-invocation, one can achieve rebirth as wished, perpetually behold the Buddha, and eternally depart the Wretched Realms.

4. The *Drum Sound Dharani Sutra* states:

At that time, the World-Honored One addressed the bhikkus: “I will expound to you on the Western Land of Peace and Joy, where a Buddha named Amitabha currently resides. If disciples from the four assemblies truly embrace and uphold the name of that Buddha, fortify their minds to continually remember and recite without forgetting, and for ten days and nights eliminate mental distraction and confusion and diligently, unceasingly practice Buddha-invocation samadhi, they will assuredly behold Amitabha Buddha within ten days and will all be reborn in his realm.”

5. The *Dharma Drum Sutra* states:

If a person is unable to engage in invocation at the time of death, as long as that person is aware that there is a Buddha in that direction and intends to be reborn there, the individual will also achieve rebirth.

6. The *Sutra on Rebirth in the Ten Directions According to Wishes* says:

Should someone at the time of death, or after having passed away, fall into hell, and his family members on his behalf invoke Amitabha Buddha, chant sutras, offer alms to monastics, and perform other meritorious deeds, the person will be released from hell and reborn in a pure land. Given this, how much more certain is rebirth in a pure realm for one who personally practices invocation in the present?

Therefore, the sutra states:

When family members now cultivate blessings for the deceased, it is like sending provisions to a distant traveler. Surely, the person will partake of them.

7. Various other sutras are referenced below for substantiation.

The *Great Dharma Drum Sutra* says:

If good men and women constantly concentrate their minds on reciting the names of Buddhas, then all Buddhas in the ten directions, along with all sages and saints, will perpetually perceive these persons as though they are present right before their eyes. For this reason, this sutra is titled the Great Dharma Drum. You should know that these persons will be reborn in the pure lands of the ten directions, in accordance with their wishes.

Moreover, the *Great Compassion Sutra* states:

What is defined as Great Compassion? Those who exclusively recite the Buddha’s name continuously without interruption are assured of rebirth in the Land of Peace and Joy at the end of their lives. If they further inspire others to do so, you should know that they are invariably termed practitioners of Great Compassion.

Therefore, the *Nirvana Sutra* states:

The Buddha told the great king: “Even if you were to open a vast treasury and give away its riches to all beings for one month, the merit gained would not compare to that accrued from uttering the Buddha’s name just once. The latter surpasses the former by an extent that is beyond measure.”

Furthermore, the *Numerical Agama* (sutra) states:

The Buddha asked Ananda: “If a sentient being offers clothing, food, beverages, bedding and medicine to all the inhabitants of Jambudvīpa, would the merit gained be considerable?” Ananda responded: “World-Honored One, indeed, it would be substantial, beyond any measure.” The Buddha then told Ananda: “If a sentient being, with a consistently virtuous mind, recites the Buddha’s name, even for the brief duration of milking a cow once, the merit accrued would surpass the former to an extent that is beyond measure, and there is no one capable of measuring it.”

The *Maha Sutra* states:

If a person recites the Buddha's name with a distracted mind, the blessings gained will be inexhaustible, persisting beyond the cessation of the person's suffering. If a person recites the Buddha's name while scattering flowers, the blessings gained will also be inexhaustible, persisting beyond the cessation of the person's suffering.

We therefore realize that the benefits of Buddha-invocation are immense and unfathomable.

The *Ten Rebirths Sutra* and other Mahayana scriptures all provide textual evidence, though it is not feasible to cite them exhaustively.

2. Difficulty or ease of meditative contemplation

This section compares the meditative contemplation in this world with that in the Pure Land, and encourages pursuit of rebirth in the latter.

This world is marked by its defiled environment which induces chaotic thoughts and impedes entry [into meditation]. Even if one achieves samadhi through practice, it remains confined to the phenomenal aspect, often tainted by attachment to the “meditative flavor.” Moreover, this samadhi can only suppress [not eradicate] negative karma, leading to rebirth in a higher [celestial] realm as a karmic reward. Upon conclusion

of that existence, retrogression is likely.

Therefore, the *Treatise on the Perfection of Wisdom* says:

***Erudition, precepts and dhyana,
Without attaining flawless Dharma,
Though they possess merit and virtue,
Their reliability remains an issue.***

If the practice of meditation is oriented towards the Western Pure Land, where phenomena and the environment radiate with purity, accomplishing meditative contemplation becomes easier. This path clears numerous *kalpas* of negative karma, ensures perpetual meditative concentration and rapid progression, and embodies ultimate purity and serenity, as expansively explained in the *Longer Sutra*.

Question: If the Western Pure Land can be invoked in meditation because of the realm's supremacy, does this imply that the Celestial Domain of Form, being inferior, cannot be elicited by meditative practice?

Answer: The causal practices of meditative concentration apply universally to both this world and the Pure Land. However, the Pure Land exists in the stage of Non-retrogression and is supported by other-power, thus it is described as supreme. In this world, even if samadhi is achieved through meditation, such practice relies solely on self-effort and lacks the Buddha's embrace. Upon the depletion of positive karma, retrogression is inevitable, rendering it inferior by comparison.

3. Purity or impurity of the two realms

This section discusses the defiled environments of this world and the pure environment of the Land of Bliss, also known as the flawed versus the flawless.

The environment in this world includes the Three Wretched Realms, mounds and pits, mountains and ravines, deserts and salt flats, thorny underbrush, floods and droughts, violent storms, harmful encounters, thunder and lightning, tigers and wolves, poisonous animals, malicious thieves, wicked people, chaos, disintegration, the Three Disasters, and ruin.

In terms of the direct retribution (karmic effects on inhabitants' bodies and minds), there are the Three Poisons, the Eight Inverted Views, sorrow, jealousy, frequent illnesses, short lifespans, hunger and thirst, cold and heat, and constant pursuit by malevolent spirits governing fate. The profound impurity and detestability of these conditions are beyond complete description. Thus this realm is referred to as "flawed," inspiring deep repugnance.

The superiority of being reborn in the Pure Land is described in the *Longer Sutra*. Humans and celestial beings from the ten directions who are reborn in that land invariably receive myriad benefits. What are these?

Once reborn in that land, their steps are cushioned by golden lotuses, and their seats are jeweled thrones that support their bodies. Departing, Sakra leads the way; returning, Brahman follows behind. All sacred

beings become their kin and friends; Amitabha Buddha is their esteemed teacher.

Beneath jeweled trees and amid precious forests, they freely soar at will. In the Pond of the Eight Meritorious Virtues, they bathe and refresh both spirit and form. Their bodies glow with a golden hue, and their lifespans are as enduring as the Buddha's own.

In pursuit of learning, they simultaneously advance along all Dharma paths. In serenity, they embrace the Two Truths in harmonious interpenetration and unobstructed unity. When assisting beings of the ten directions, they wield great supernatural powers; in moments of tranquil repose, they reside within the Three Voids. On their journeys, they follow the Noble Eightfold Path; upon achieving their ultimate goal, they attain the great Nirvana.

All sentient beings, upon reaching that land, will realize these benefits. Why not reflect upon this? Why delay making the journey?

4. Citation of evidence to encourage faith

This section cites the sacred teachings as evidence to awaken faith in future generations and urge them to seek rebirth in the Pure Land.

The *Sutra on Buddha-Contemplation Samadhi* states:

At that time, within the assembly Buddhas from the ten directions manifested in the air, each seated cross-legged on a lotus pedestal.

Leading them was Tathagata Good Virtue of the East, who addressed the assembly: “You should know, as I recall, countless lifetimes ago, there was a Buddha named Supreme King of Treasure Majestic Virtue. When he appeared in the world, he also taught the Three Vehicles, just as they are today.

After the Parinirvana of that Buddha, in the Age of Dharma Decline, a bhikku and his nine disciples went to a pagoda to pay homage to Buddha statues. There they saw a majestic, awe-inspiring statue. After reverently observing it, they prostrated themselves and looked upon it with deep attention, each uttering a verse in its praise. As time progressed, they departed this life, according to their individual lifespans, whether long or short.

Following their demise, they were immediately reborn before a Buddha. They thenceforth encountered innumerable Buddhas. In the presence of these Buddhas, they extensively pursued monastic practices and attained ocean-like Buddha-

invocation samadhi. All Buddhas thereafter manifested before them, conferring prophecies of their eventual Buddhahood. Subsequently, they each became a Buddha in one of the ten directions as wished.

The Good Virtue Buddha of the East was none other than myself; the Buddhas from the remaining nine directions were my nine former disciples. These World-Honored Ones from the ten directions each achieved Buddhahood by venerating the pagoda and reciting a verse in praise. Could they be anyone else? No, they are us – the Buddhas from the ten directions.”

At that moment, the Buddhas from the ten directions descended from the sky, each emanating thousands of rays of light and manifesting their physical forms with the radiant white tufts of hair between their eyebrows. They each took a seat upon Shakyamuni Buddha’s divan and addressed Ananda:

“You are aware that Shakyamuni Buddha, through immeasurable diligence and countless ascetic practices, pursued Buddha wisdom, thereby attaining this Buddha form as his reward. We have now conveyed this teaching to you. Uphold the Buddhas’ teachings and, for future generations of devas, dragons and the four assemblies of disciples, explicate [this teaching of] contemplating the physical marks and characteristics of Buddhas and practicing Buddha-invocation samadhi.”

Having spoken these words, they paid homage to Shakyamuni Buddha. They returned to their respective realms upon conclusion of their salutations.



The 6th Great Teaching

The Sixth Teaching comprises three sections:

1. Comparison of the Pure Land with all the pure realms in the ten directions.
2. Inference from doctrinal principles.
3. Exposition on the persistence and disappearance of sutras.

1. Comparing the Western Pure Land with other pure realms

This section compares the Pure Land with other pure realms in the ten directions. It comprises three subsections.

i) The *Sutra on Rebirth According to Wishes* says:

Buddha realms throughout the ten directions are pure and splendid, and rebirth there can be attained as wished. However, none compare to the Pure Land of Infinite Life in the West.

Why is this? Because Amitabha Buddha and Bodhisattvas Avalokitesvara and Mahasthamaprapta first awakened their Bodhi-mind in this Saha world, establishing an exceptional karmic connection with its beings. Hence, Shakyamuni Buddha consistently praised and advocated rebirth in that land.

ii) According to the *Longer Sutra*, during his phase of causal practices, Bodhisattva Dharmakara made grand vows in the presence of Lokeshvararaja Buddha, aiming to incorporate the splendors of pure realms. At that time, Lokeshvararaja Buddha expounded on 21 billion Buddha Lands, detailing the virtues and shortcomings of their celestial and human inhabitants, as well as the various levels of sophistication and coarseness of these realms. All these details were fully revealed to him.

Bodhisattva Dharmakara then resolved to attain Buddhahood in the western direction, and now resides in his Pure Land in the West. This serves as the second proof.

iii) According to the *Contemplation Sutra*, Queen Vaidehi also inquired about pure lands. In response, Tathagata Shakyamuni displayed all the pure realms of the ten directions upon a radiant platform [above his head]. Queen Vaidehi addressed the Buddha:

Although all these Buddha Lands are pure and luminous, I am now willing to be reborn in the Land of Bliss of Amitabha Buddha.

This constitutes the third proof.

We therefore know that among all the pure lands, the Land of Peace and Joy is supreme.

2. Inference from doctrinal principles

This section makes assessments from doctrinal principles.

Question: Why is it necessary to face west when sitting, bowing, reciting and contemplating?

Answer: As it pertains to Jambudvīpa, the direction of sunrise symbolizes birth, while the direction of sunset represents death. Aligning with the point of death — the direction into which the spiritual consciousness of the departed enters — facilitates access to Amitabha’s deliverance. For this reason, Bodhisattva Dharmakara vowed, out of compassion, to attain Buddhahood in the West to welcome sentient beings.

Facing the Buddha while sitting, contemplating, bowing and reciting accommodates worldly customs of reverence. Sacred beings, who have attained the reward of freedom to fly unrestrained, may find the distinction of directions irrelevant. For ordinary people, whose minds and bodies are inseparably linked, facing any direction other than west undoubtedly complicates their journey towards the Western Pure Land.

Therefore, the *Treatise on the Perfection of Wisdom* notes:

There was a bhikku who dedicated his life to chanting the Amitabha Sutra and reciting “Prajna Paramita.” As he neared the end of his life, he informed his disciples: “Amitabha Buddha and the sacred assembly are now before me.” Joining his palms to take refuge, he soon passed away.

The disciples cremated his body according to the cremation rites. While his entire body was reduced to ashes, his tongue alone remained intact, unchanged from its original condition. They collected it and constructed a stupa to enshrine and venerate it.

Bodhisattva Nagarjuna explains:

Due to his chanting of the Amitabha Sutra, he was personally welcomed by the Buddha at the moment of death. Because he recited “Prajna Paramita,” his tongue remained indestructible.

With this scriptural evidence, we realize that all practices, when dedicated [towards the Western Pure Land], invariably lead to rebirth there.

Therefore the *Four Quarters of Sumeru Sutra* states:

At the time when heaven and earth first separated, there were neither sun, moon nor stars; even when celestial beings descended, they used only their halos for light. During that period, the human population endured severe hardships.

Amitabha Buddha then dispatched two Bodhisattvas, named Precious Response Voice and Precious Auspiciousness, who were Fu Xi and Nü Wa, respectively.

After consulting together, the Bodhisattvas visited the seventh Brahma Heaven to acquire the seven treasures. Bringing them to this realm, they fashioned the sun, moon, stars and the twenty-eight lunar mansions, illuminating the sky and earth. They also established the four seasons: spring, summer, autumn and winter.

At that time, the Bodhisattvas remarked between them: “The sun, moon, stars and the twenty-eight lunar mansions move westward because all celestial and human beings bow in reverence to Amitabha Buddha. Thus, out of devotion, these celestial bodies gravitate towards the Pure Land, resulting in their westward trajectory.”

3. The persistence and disappearance of sutras

This section explains the persistence and cessation of sutras.

The Dharma dispensation of Shakyamuni Buddha unfolds in three phases: 500 years of Correct Dharma, 1,000 years of Semblance Dharma, and 10,000 years of Dharma Decline. As sentient beings die out thoroughly, all sutras will perish. However, out of compassion for beings suffering from pains and burnings, the Tathagata will specially preserve this sutra (the *Longer Sutra*) for an additional one hundred years.

With this scriptural evidence, we understand that although that land is a pure realm, its substance encompasses the highest through to the lowest. Those who recognize that phenomenal characteristics have no [inherent] form will attain rebirth at the upper level. Ordinary beings, caught in the burning house, always depend on phenomenal characteristics to achieve rebirth there.

The 7th Great Teaching

The Seventh Teaching comprises two sections:

1. Adoption of phenomenal characteristics of this world and of the Pure Land, resulting in bondage versus liberation.
2. Efforts of cultivation in this world and in the Pure Land, differentiating genuine from illusory rewards — and advocating rebirth in the Pure Land.

1. Phenomenal characteristics in the two realms

This section delineates the differences between bondage and liberation, relating to adoption of the phenomenal characteristics of this world versus those of the Pure Land.

By embracing the pristine characteristics of the Pure Land, one quickly attains liberation, experiencing supreme bliss. The “wisdom eye” becomes unobstructed and luminous. Conversely, adopting the impure characteristics of this world leads only to illusory happiness, ignorance

and blindness, adversity and entanglement, anxiety and fear.

Question: Mahayana sutras consistently teach that achieving detachment from phenomenal characteristics is essential to transcending worldly fetters. Attachment to such characteristics leads inevitably to bondage and obstruction. Now sentient beings are encouraged to renounce the impurities [of this world] and aspire to the purity [of the Pure Land]. How should such guidance be interpreted?

Answer: The two principles are completely different. Why? There exist two kinds of phenomenal characteristics:

1. In the realm of the five dusts and sensual desires, deluded attachments and covetous passions emerge, compelling one to cling to the perceived environment. These phenomenal characteristics are identified as bondage.

2. Affection for the virtues of Buddhas and the [resultant] aspiration to rebirth in the Pure Land, though categorized as phenomenal characteristics, are acknowledged as liberation.

How do we know? The *Sutra of the Ten Stages* explains:

Bodhisattvas at the First Stage still contemplate the Two Truths separately. Through mental exertion and intention formation, they initially rely on phenomenal characteristics in their pursuit and eventually attain non-attachment to characteristics. This is a gradual process that culminates in the realization of Great Bodhi. The inclination to pursue phenomenal characteristics dissolves only after reaching the ultimate mindset by the

Seventh Stage. Upon entering the Eighth Stage, they completely transcend the pursuit of phenomenal characteristics, and only then it is rightly called the “Effortless Stage.”

Therefore, the *Treatise* [on the aforementioned *Sutra of the Ten Stages*] declares:

Up to and including the Seventh Stage, unwholesome craving constitutes an obstacle, while wholesome craving serves as a cure. From the Eighth Stage onwards, wholesome craving itself becomes the obstacle, and the eradication of all craving serves as the cure.

As for those currently aspiring to rebirth in the Pure Land, identified as “outer ordinary beings”, the virtuous roots they cultivate stem entirely from their affection for the Buddha’s merits and virtues. How can this be regarded as bondage?

Moreover, the *Nirvana Sutra* states:

All beings possess two types of affection: one is wholesome affection, and the other, unwholesome affection. Unwholesome affection is pursued only by the ignorant; whereas affection for wholesome dharma is sought by Bodhisattvas.

Thus, the *Pure Land Treatise* [*Commentary on the Treatise on Rebirth in the Pure Land*] says:

Flavors of contemplating the purity of the Buddha Land, of the Mahayana in embracing and delivering sentient beings, of [Bodhisattvas’] practices of imitating [Amitabha’s] feats by vowing

to establish pure lands, and of [Amitabha's] ultimate substantive sustenance and support. There are countless flavors of the Buddha Path such as these.

Hence, although these characteristics are embraced, such embrace does not constitute an attachment that binds. Furthermore, the characteristics ascribed to the Pure Land are indeed those of a flawless nature and pertain to Ultimate Reality.

2. Cultivation in the two realms

This section compares the rigor and ease of cultivation efforts in this world and in the Pure Land. It also differentiates real from false rewards.

Those who aspire to be reborn in the West (Pure Land) need only dedicate brief periods to prostration, contemplation and recitation. At the moment of death, regardless of their lifespan, they will be welcomed [by Amitabha's] radiant lotus throne and swiftly advance to the Pure Land, achieving the stage of Non-retrogression.

So the *Longer Sutra* states:

Should celestial and human beings from the ten directions, reborn in my land, not ultimately accomplish nirvana, or should any of them retrogress, may I not attain perfect enlightenment.

In this world, those who comprehensively cultivate generosity, precepts, forbearance, diligence, meditation and wisdom for extended

periods, yet for less than 10,000 *kalpas*, consistently fail to escape the burning house; they remain in perversion and descent. Thus this path requires extremely arduous effort, but yields only illusory rewards.

The *Longer Sutra* also declares:

Those reborn in my land will quickly cut off [the cycle of rebirth in] the Five Wretched Realms.

This indicates that, in contrast to Amitabha’s Pure Land, all five (six) realms of the Saha world are considered Wretched Realms. These include the realms of hell, hungry ghosts and animals, which result exclusively from negative karma and are therefore identified as Wretched Realms. Even the human and celestial domains of the Saha world, characterized by mixed karma, are categorized as wretched.

In this world, practitioners aiming to quell [vexations] and extinguish [negative karma] must first eliminate the Delusion of Views, distancing themselves from the causes leading to the Three Wretched Realms and nullifying the consequences of such descents. Subsequently, they must dispel the Delusion of Thoughts, steering clear of the causes for rebirth in the Human and Celestial Realms and conclusively ending such rebirths. These stages represent a gradual eradication, not a “quick cut-off.”

By attaining rebirth in Amitabha’s Pure Land, one instantaneously forsakes the entirety of the Five Realms of the Saha world, a process described as “quick cut-off.” The phrase “quickly cutting off the Five Wretched Realms” relates to severing karmic consequences, while the line “the Wretched Realms will close as a matter of course” signifies the cessation of karmic causes. These expressions clarify what is to be

abandoned [as a result of rebirth]. “This path of ascension is limitless” highlights the achievement to be realized.

Those who set their resolve and earnestly aspire towards the West, from up to a lifetime’s recitation to just ten recitations, will unfailingly attain rebirth in the Pure Land. Upon reaching that realm, they immediately join the Assembly of Assured Enlightenment, an accomplishment equivalent to the fruition of practicing for 10,000 *kalpas* in this Saha world.

The 8th Great Teaching

The Eighth Teaching comprises three sections:

1. Brief enumeration of various scriptures as evidence, advocating renunciation of this world and aspiration to the Pure Land.
2. Comparison of Amitabha Buddha and Shakyamuni Buddha.
3. Explanation of the significance of rebirth.

1. Sutras advocating rebirth in the Pure Land

This section briefly enumerates various Mahayana sutras as evidence, advocating renunciation of this world and aspiration to the Pure Land.

- i) The *Longer Sutra*, consisting of two fascicles, taught at Mt. Gridhrakuta (Vulture Peak);
- ii) The *Contemplation Sutra*, a single fascicle, specially presented at two gatherings: in the Royal Palace (Rajgir) and at Mt. Gridhrakuta;

iii) The shorter version of the *Infinite Life Sutra* [i.e., *Amitabha Sutra*], delivered at one assembly in Sravasti;

iv) *Sutra on Rebirth in the Ten Directions According to Wishes*, offering clear evidence;

v) *Sutra of Infinite Pure Enlightenment*, comprising two fascicles, expounded specially in one assembly;

vi) *Ten Rebirths Sutra*, one fascicle.

Numerous other Mahayana sutras and commentaries abound with passages that commend the Pure Land and guide people towards it. Examples include the *Sutra on Invocation of Avalokitesvara* and the *Maha Sutra*, among others, as well as treatises by luminaries like Nagarjuna and Vasubandhu, all replete with expressions of admiration and encouragement. This level of emphatic urging is unparalleled in discussions of other pure lands.

2. Comparison of the two Buddhas

This section compares Amitabha Buddha and Shakyamuni Buddha.

Tathagata Shakyamuni, the Buddha of this realm, dwelt in the world for 80 years. His presence was fleeting, and upon his departure, he did not return. In the time scales of various heavens, such as Trayastrimsa, his stay on Earth was less than a day.

Moreover, during the lifetime of Shakyamuni Buddha, the causal conditions for his deliverance of sentient beings were limited, as exemplified by his rescue of people during an epidemic in Vaisali. What happened? The residents of Vaisali were stricken with five severe ailments:

- Eyes reddened to the color of blood,
- Ears discharging pus,
- Noses bleeding,
- Tongues stiffened into silence,
- Food consumed turning rough and astringent to the taste.

As a result, their sixth perception (consciousness) was obstructed, leaving them as though inebriated.

There were five Yakshas, also named Krishnakala, whose faces were as dark as ink and who had five eyes each. Their protruding fangs drained humans of their vital essence. Jivaka, an eminent physician, exhausted his medical expertise and skills but failed to cure the afflicted. Eventually, an elder named Somachattrā, leading a group of the ill, sought refuge with the Buddha. They prostrated themselves and pleaded for mercy.

Moved by boundless compassion, the World-Honored One addressed the ailing: “To the West reside Amitabha Buddha and Bodhisattvas Avalokitesvara and Mahasthamaprapta. You should wholeheartedly join your palms to behold them.” Following the Buddha’s guidance, the assembly pressed their palms together in earnest supplication.

At that moment, Amitabha Buddha emitted a brilliant radiance, and Avalokitesvara and Mahasthamaprapta arrived simultaneously, uttering a powerful mantra. All illnesses and suffering completely vanished, and the afflicted were restored to their original state of well-being.

Indeed, the supernatural powers of the two Buddhas are equally matched. However, Shakyamuni Buddha does not display his own capabilities. Instead, he deliberately highlighted those of Amitabha Buddha, with the aim of guiding all sentient beings to aspire to the Pure Land. Therefore, Shakyamuni Buddha persistently praises and encourages rebirth in that realm. It is crucial to understand this point.

Hence, Master Tanluan earnestly resolves to seek rebirth in the West. Accordingly, in alignment with the *Longer Sutra*, he offers his praise, saying:

*Sravakas and Bodhisattvas in the Pure Land dwell,
With humans and celestials, their wisdom does excel.
All share features splendid, with no difference to see,
Named thus for other realms, in their diversity.
In complexions divine, none can compare,
Neither human nor deva, their forms fine and fair.
Bodies ethereal, boundless in extent,
To this Universal Power, my respects are sent.*

3. The significance of rebirth

This section explains the significance of rebirth in the Pure Land, comprising two subsections:

- i) Explanation of the significance of rebirth.
- ii) Questions and answers.

Question: I aspire to rebirth in the Pure Land, but I am uncertain about its purpose.

Answer: The sole purpose is quickly to achieve both self-benefit and the benefit of others, offering profound and extensive advantages to sentient beings.

[Self-benefits:]

- Achieving the stages of the Ten Faiths and Three Sages;
- Embracing and upholding the correct Dharma;
- Grasping non-duality;
- Witnessing and realizing Buddha-nature;
- Clearly perceiving Ultimate Reality;
- Observing, with an enlightened mind, the two truths of existence and non-existence, as well as the sequential order of cause and effect;

- Distinguishing between superiority and inferiority within the Ten Bodhisattva Stages;
- Attaining the Three Endurances and the Three Paths;
- Achieving the unhindered Vajrasamadhi stage;
- Realizing the great Nirvana.

[Benefits for others:] Following the Mahayana path for extensive deliverance of sentient beings, wishing to dwell indefinitely [in the Dharma realm], aiming to exhaust the boundless sea of samsara.

The following question will be addressed from three perspectives.

Question: If the aspiration to rebirth in the Pure Land is aimed at benefiting sentient beings, then the beings in need of deliverance are right here in this Saha world. Those who have developed such resolve should remain here to alleviate the suffering of these beings. Why, then, after awakening this resolve, does one first aspire to be reborn in the Pure Land? This seems akin to forsaking sentient beings in pursuit of the personal bliss of enlightenment.

Answer: This reasoning is unsuitable. Why?

1. As the *Treatise on the Perfection of Wisdom* says:

Imagine two persons witnessing their parents and relatives drowning in a deep abyss. One person immediately proceeds, exerting all his strength to save them. However, his capabilities prove insufficient, and he ends up drowning alongside them. The

other person instead runs to find a boat, with which he returns to rescue everyone, bringing them all out of danger.

Bodhisattvas are similar. Before the initiation of the Bodhi-mind, they drift in the cycle of birth and death, no different from other sentient beings. Once the Bodhi-mind is awakened, they first aspire to be reborn in the Pure Land, aiming to acquire the “boat of Great Compassion.” Equipped with the “vessel of unimpeded eloquence,” they enter the sea of samsara to deliver sentient beings.

2. Further, the *Great Treatise* states:

When a Bodhisattva is reborn in the Pure Land, he is endowed with great supernatural powers and unimpeded eloquence. However, even when he teaches sentient beings, he cannot always ensure that they cultivate virtue, eliminate vice, advance on their paths, and progress in their stages, to the satisfaction of the Bodhisattva. If he were to try to help others by remaining in the defiled land, he would lack those benefits entirely. This situation is like forcing a chicken into water; how can it avoid getting wet?

3. In *Praise of the Longer Sutra* says:

*Bodhisattvas in Peace and Joy, the Land of Amitabha
All follow their wisdom in expounding the Dharma.
In themselves and things, they perceive no “I” or “mine,”
Pure as lotuses, unstained by worldly grime.*

*They come and go, move and stay, like rowing afloat,
Benefiting sentient beings, without bias they devote.*

*Self and others seen as void, duality they eradicate,
Wisdom torch brightly lit, long nights they illuminate.*

*Possessed of the Three Insights and Six Powers complete,
Through their minds' eyes, perceiving Bodhisattva deeds.
Such virtues, vast and boundless, extensively unfold,
Sincerely I yearn for rebirth in that sacred abode.*

The 9th Great Teaching

The Ninth Teaching comprises two sections:

1. Contrast between suffering and happiness, good and evil.
2. Comparison of the lifespan in this world with that in the Pure Land.

1. Suffering and happiness in the two lands

This section contains two subsections:

- i) Contrast between suffering and happiness, good and evil.
- ii) Citations from the *Longer Sutra* as supporting evidence.

The first subsection discusses the contrast between suffering and happiness, good and evil [as observed in the two realms].

In this Saha world, karmic consequences manifest as either joy or distress. However, happiness is scarce and suffering is abundant. Severe agonies are the pains and burnings in the Three Wretched Realms,

whereas lesser forms include wars and illnesses among humans and celestial beings. Such adversities persist unceasingly, one following another, spanning countless *kalpas* without interruption. Even the slight happiness experienced in human and celestial realms is transient, akin to bubbles or flashes of lightning – appearing quickly and vanishing just as rapidly. Therefore, this world is recognized as a realm of suffering and evil.

In Amitabha Buddha’s Pure Land, waters, birds and forests constantly emit the sounds of the Dharma, clearly proclaiming the teachings of the Path. These sounds, in their pure, unblemished form, enable beings to attain enlightenment.

The second subsection references the sacred teachings as corroborating evidence.

The *Treatise on the Pure Land* asserts:

Human and celestial beings from the ten directions, upon being reborn in the Pure Land, are no different from Pure-Mind Bodhisattvas; Pure-Mind Bodhisattvas, along with Bodhisattvas of Higher Stages, will ultimately attain the endurance of Tranquil Extinction, and will never retrogress.

The following citation from the *Longer Sutra* pertains to the 48 Vows, highlighting five significant benefits.

The *Longer Sutra* states:

- 1. If celestial and human beings born in my land should not all be in the hue of genuine gold, may I not attain perfect enlightenment.**
- 2. If celestial and human beings born in my land should have any difference between beautiful and ugly in physique or countenance, may I not attain perfect enlightenment.**
- 3. If celestial and human beings born in my land should not attain intelligence of remembering their previous lives, or at least should not know the events of 100,000 koti nayuta kalpas, may I not attain perfect enlightenment.**
- 4. If celestial and human beings born in my land should not acquire clairaudience, or at least should not hear the teachings of 100,000 koti nayuta Buddhas, or should not accept and uphold all these teachings, may I not attain perfect enlightenment.**
- 5. If celestial and human beings born in my land should not possess telepathy, or at least should not know the thoughts of sentient beings in 100,000 koti nayuta Buddha Lands, may I not attain perfect enlightenment.**

Specifying all the benefits of that land is a formidable task. Simply aspiring to be reborn there ensures unfathomable outcomes. Therefore, that realm is characterized solely by virtue and happiness, entirely free from suffering and evil.

2. Lifespans in this world and in the Pure Land

This section compares the lifespans in the two realms.

In this world, [human] lifespans rarely extend beyond a hundred years. Around such a century, a few live longer while many die sooner. Some perish in their year of birth or during childhood. Others are even harmed or aborted in the womb. What is the reason for this? The complex and varied karmic causes created by sentient beings result in diverse and unequal karmic consequences.

Therefore, the *Nirvana Sutra* states:

Creating black (non-virtuous) karma results in black retribution; creating white (virtuous) karma results in white repercussions. The same principle applies to pure and impure karma.

Moreover, according to the *Sutra of Pure Deliverance by Bodhisattvas*:

Human life spans a hundred years, but nights claim half, reducing it by fifty. Of the remaining fifty years, the first fifteen are spent without discerning good from evil; beyond eighty, one contends with senility and frailty, enduring the pains of aging. This leaves merely fifteen years. During this period, external pressures such as obligations to sovereigns, distant military deployments, or confinement in prison may arise. Internally, one confronts

the fortunes and misfortunes of the household, entanglements in miscellaneous matters, and feelings of loneliness, fear and constant dissatisfaction. Given this calculation, how much time remains for cultivating the Path? Upon such reflection, how could one not feel sorrow? Why would one not grow weary?

The sutra further proclaims:

Once born into this world, a person generates 840 million thoughts throughout each day and night. A single malevolent thought condemns one to a lifetime in a wretched bodily form; ten such thoughts result in ten lifetimes; a hundred malevolent thoughts lead to a hundred lifetimes in such wretched forms. When considered over a lifespan, a being who continually harbors malevolent thoughts for [approximately] a hundred years will be consigned to wretched forms that pervade the entire three-thousand-fold chiliocosm.

Just as this is true for negative dharmas, the principle equally applies to positive ones. A single virtuous thought results in one lifetime of auspicious bodily form; a hundred virtuous thoughts yield a hundred lifetimes in such forms. In consideration of the entire lifespan, a being who maintains benevolent thoughts for [about] a hundred years will obtain virtuous forms that similarly fill up the three-thousand-fold chiliocosm.

By reciting the name of Amitabha Buddha for ten, five or many years, one will subsequently be reborn in the Land of Infinite Life, attaining the pure-realm Dharma Body, which is as boundless as the grains of sand in the Ganges and beyond comprehension. Given the transient nature of

existence in this defiled world, each person's rewarded lifetime never extends far. Upon rebirth in Amitabha's Pure Land, the lifespan will be of unfathomably long duration.

Therefore, the *Infinite Life Sutra* (the *Shorter Sutra*, or *Amitabha Sutra*) states:

The Buddha told Sariputra: "Why is that Buddha called Amitabha? Sariputra, the human and celestial beings from the ten directions who are reborn in that land have lifespans lasting billions and thousands of kalpas, equal to that of the Buddha. This is why the Buddha is named Amitabha."

Everyone should consider this vast benefit and aspire to be reborn there.

Further, the *Respectable Sutra on Emperor Good King* states:

Suppose there is someone practicing the Path who aspires to be reborn in the Western Land of Amitabha Buddha and engages in continual recollection and recitation, day and night, for one to seven days. Even if this person harbors thoughts of regret during this time, but then learns of the merits and virtues of the Good King as I have described, at the end of his life, eight Bodhisattvas will fly over to escort him to the Land of Amitabha Buddha in the West. His rebirth there will proceed unhindered under any circumstances.

Below is additional evidence from the *Gatha on the Longer Sutra*. The verse of praise states:

*In Land of Peace and Joy, beings are reborn,
With thirty-two marks, their bodies to adorn.
Their wisdom perfected, into deep Dharma they enter,
Grasping the Way's essence, free from every barrier.*

*Capabilities sharp or dull, each gains endurance,
From the three types to countless beyond utterance.
Fate-knowing and four others, powers freely directed,
Till Buddhahood never to fall into realms mixed and wretched.*

*Except when reborn in realms of Five Turbidities,
They appear like Shakyamuni, great personalities.
Rebirth in Peace and Joy offers boundless returns,
Thus, with utmost sincerity, for that rebirth I yearn.*

The 10th Great Teaching

The Tenth Teaching comprises two sections:

1. Citation of similar cases from the *Longer Sutra* as evidence to substantiate the argument.
2. Explanation of the significance of merit-dedication.

1. Cases of aspirants from the ten directions

This section cites similar cases from the *Longer Sutra* as evidence to substantiate the argument.

Buddhas of the ten directions uniformly encourage seeking rebirth in the Western Pure Land. Bodhisattvas from the ten directions are born there together. Humans and celestial beings of the ten directions all aim to return there. We thus know rebirth in that land is unfathomable. Therefore, *In Praise of the Longer Sutra* states:

*Infinite in divine power is Buddha Amitabha,
Praised from ten directions by countless Tathagatas.
From eastern Buddha realms, innumerable as Ganges sand,
A myriad Bodhisattvas come, to worship him in his land.*

*Also in that blissful abode, they present their offerings,
To Bodhisattvas and Sravakas, amid their gatherings.
Hearing Dharma sutras, the teachings they proclaim,
In the nine other directions, Bodhisattvas do the same.*

2. Significance of merit-dedication

This section explains the meaning of merit-dedication.

Since all sentient beings have Buddha-nature, everyone possesses the will to achieve Buddhahood. However, if we rely solely on the merit accumulated through our practice, and if this practice period has not reached 10,000 *kalpas*, we remain trapped in the burning domain of samsara, unable to break free of reincarnation. Thus, from compassion for such prolonged suffering, the Great Sage advises dedicating merit toward rebirth in the Western Pure Land, thereby attaining profound benefits.

The function of merit-dedication does not exceed six types. What are the six?

i) Dedicating all positive karma from practice toward Amitabha. Upon reaching his realm, one gains the six supernatural powers, enabling

the deliverance of sentient beings. This is termed “not abiding in nirvana.”

ii) Dedicating causes toward fruition.

iii) Dedicating the lesser [practices] toward the supreme [merits].

iv) Dedicating the slower [progress] to the quicker [attainment]. This is known as “not abiding in the mundane world.”

v) Dedicating [merit] to sentient beings, compassionately intending to encourage their turn towards virtue.

vi) Dedicating [merit] back to oneself, aimed at dispelling discriminative thinking.

These six aspects constitute the function of merit-dedication.

Therefore, the *Longer Sutra* declares:

Sentient beings born into my land naturally advance, transcending the ordinary sequence of Bodhisattva-practice stages. They are bound to attain Buddhahood, eternally free from the risk of retrogression.

And *In Praise of the Longer Sutra* articulates:

***Bodhisattvas and Sravakas in the Land of Joy and Peace,
None in this world, their superiority one sees.
Shakyamuni with great, unobstructed eloquence,
Through analogies tells, but a bit of their brilliance.***

*To the lowliest beggar, an emperor is compared,
Then emperor to chakravartin, distinctions declared.
Ascending through realms, to the sphere of Sixth Heaven,
All akin to the first pair, in progressive comparison.*

*Devas measured against beings in the Land of Bliss,
Quadrillion times lesser, the contrast beyond this.
All by Dharmakara's vows, these wonders are born,
To the vast power of Amitabha's mind, my reverence is sworn.*



The 11th Great Teaching

The Eleventh Teaching comprises two sections, briefly:

1. Exhortation to all sentient beings to rely on Dharma mentors and aspire to rebirth in the West.
2. Discussion of the superiority or inferiority of conditions for rebirth after death.

1. Exhortation to rely on Dharma mentors

This section urges reliance on Dharma mentors.

In the *Dharma Verse Sutra*, the role of Dharma guides for sentient beings is explored:

Treasure Brightness Bodhisattva asked the Buddha: “World-Honored One, what qualifies one as a Dharma mentor?” The Buddha replied: “Dharma mentors are those capable of expounding the profound teachings such as emptiness, formlessness and desirelessness; the universal equality of all phenomena; the absence of karma and retributions; the non-

existence of cause and effect; the Ultimate Suchness; and abidance in the Sphere of Ultimate Reality. However, within the realm of Beyond-Extreme Emptiness, they ardently establish all phenomena. This is what defines a Dharma mentor.

“Dharma mentors are your parents, nurturing your Bodhi-body; they are your eyes, discerning all paths of good and evil. Dharma mentors are your great ship, carrying you across the sea of birth and death; they are your strong rope, rescuing you from the cycle of transmigration.”

The sutra further advises that those serving as Dharma mentors to sentient beings must seek rebirth in the Western Pure Land. Why? Because, dwelling in this burning world, they face myriad conditions, both supportive and discouraging, that often lead to retrogression and submersion. As a result, liberation becomes hard to achieve.

For this reason, Sariputra, having resolved to pursue the Bodhisattva path in this world for sixty *kalpas*, immediately retrogressed upon encountering a malevolent acquaintance who begged for his eyes. This incident illustrates the extreme difficulty of cultivating the Path in this burning realm. Hence, the exhortation to seek rebirth in the Western Pure Land. Upon arrival there, the Three Learnings naturally progress, and all virtuous practices are fully perfected.

Therefore, the *Longer Sutra* declares:

In the Pure Land of Amitabha, there is not even a speck of space as minuscule as a hair for committing evil.

2. Superiority or inferiority of rebirth after death

This section delineates the superiority or inferiority of beings' rebirth after death.

Upon reaching the end of their lives in this realm, all sentient beings are inevitably propelled by their positive and negative karma. They are perpetually driven into reincarnation by the Lords of Fate, their jailers, delusional attachments and afflictions. Over countless *kalpas*, they have never been able to escape.

If they develop faith and direct their aspirations towards the Pure Land, exercising resolute intention and concentrated diligence, then, upon life's conclusion, Amitabha Buddha, accompanied by Bodhisattva Avalokitesvara and the sacred assembly, will welcome them with a radiant lotus throne. Filled with joy, a practitioner follows, palms joined, and ascends the throne. In an instant, he reaches the Pure Land, where he is immersed in bliss until he attains Buddhahood.

Moreover, all sentient beings create diverse karma, which falls into three categories: superior, intermediate and inferior. Regardless, they are all destined for King Yama's judgment. However, those who believe in the karmic conditions of [deliverance by] Amitabha Buddha, aspire to rebirth in the Pure Land, and dedicate all the merit from their practices towards this aim, will be personally welcomed by Amitabha Buddha at the end of their lives. Such people will bypass King Yama altogether.



The 12th Great Teaching

The Twelfth Teaching consists of a single section, which references the *Ten Rebirths Sutra* as proof, advocating rebirth in the Pure Land.

As the Buddha (Shakyamuni) teaches about rebirth in the land of Amitabha Buddha, he instructs the multitudes to practice body-contemplation with correct mindfulness as a path to liberation.

The *Ten Rebirths Sutra* states:

Ananda addressed the Buddha: “World-Honored One, for all sentient beings, what is the method of body-contemplation? Please kindly expound upon this.”

The Buddha answered Ananda: “In the practice of body-contemplation, do not focus on the directions — east, west, north, south, the four inter-cardinals, above, or below — or on the void. It’s not about observing external or internal conditions, the body’s form, the audible aspects of form, or the visual manifestations of form. Instead, contemplate ‘non-condition’ alone. This constitutes the correct and genuine approach to body-contemplation. Beyond this method, no matter how diligently one searches in the ten directions, everywhere, there exists no alternative means to liberation.”

The Buddha further told Ananda: “Simply through practicing body-contemplation, virtuous power naturally strengthens, correct mindfulness naturally arises, and liberation naturally unfolds. Why is this? Consider someone who, through diligent and sincere effort, attains true liberation. For this person, even without deliberately seeking liberation, liberation comes on its own.”

Ananda again addressed the Buddha: “World-Honored One, if sentient beings in the world could attain liberation through such correct mindfulness, then the Three Wretched Realms of hell beings, hungry ghosts, and animals should not exist.”

The Buddha responded: “What is the reason for the failure of sentient beings in the world to achieve liberation? The reason is that all beings are mostly insincere and seldom genuine, completely lacking in correct mindfulness. With precisely this cause, many descend into hellish realms, while few find liberation.

“Consider someone who outwardly displays filial piety towards his parents, respect to teachers and reverence towards monastics, yet inwardly harbors disrespect. Though appearing diligent externally, he embodies dishonesty internally. Such a morally compromised person, though not yet facing immediate retribution, is nevertheless on the brink of the Three Wretched Realms. Without correct mindfulness, liberation is unattainable.”

Ananda further asked the Buddha: “In such a case, what kind of virtuous root should one cultivate to attain true liberation?”

The Buddha said to Ananda: “Listen carefully now, as I am about to explain to you. There are ten methods of rebirth that can lead to liberation. What are these ten?”

“1. Practice body-contemplation with correct mindfulness, always cherish joy, and offer food, drink and clothing to Buddhas and monastics; this will lead to rebirth in Amitabha Buddha’s Land.

“2. With correct mindfulness, offer sweet, excellent and effective medicine to a sick bhikku and to all sentient beings; this will lead to rebirth in Amitabha Buddha’s Land.

“3. With correct mindfulness, harm no living being and extend compassion to all; this will lead to rebirth in Amitabha Buddha’s Land.

“4. With correct mindfulness, faithfully observe the precepts received from the master, cultivate monastic conduct with pure wisdom, and always cherish joy; this will lead to rebirth in Amitabha Buddha’s Land.

“5. With correct mindfulness, demonstrate filial piety towards parents, show reverence to teachers and elders, and refrain from harboring arrogance; this will lead to rebirth in Amitabha Buddha’s Land.

“6. With correct mindfulness, make pilgrimages to monastic quarters, show veneration for pagodas and temples, and, upon hearing Dharma teachings, understand at least one principle;

this will lead to rebirth in Amitabha Buddha's Land.

“7. With correct mindfulness, receive and observe the Eight Precepts for an entire day and night, ensuring not to breach any; this will lead to rebirth in Amitabha Buddha's Land.

“8. With correct mindfulness, stay away from the household during fasting days and months, and regularly visit virtuous teachers; this will lead to rebirth in Amitabha Buddha's Land.

“9. With correct mindfulness, always maintain pure precepts, diligently practice meditation, safeguard the Dharma, and refrain from harsh speech; this will lead to rebirth in Amitabha Buddha's Land.

“10. With correct mindfulness, avoid harboring slanderous thoughts towards the Supreme Path, diligently uphold pure precepts, instruct the unwise, spread the teachings of this sutra, and guide and transform countless sentient beings; all such practitioners will attain rebirth in Amitabha Buddha's Land.”

At that time, in the assembly, there was a Bodhisattva named Mountain-Ocean Wisdom. He addressed the Buddha: “World-Honored One, what are the marvelous and joyous wonders in Amitabha's Land that make all beings aspire to be reborn there?”

The Buddha said to Bodhisattva Mountain-Ocean Wisdom: “You should now stand up, press your palms together and stand erect facing west. With correct mindfulness, contemplate Amitabha

Buddha’s Land, wishing to behold Amitabha Buddha.”

At that moment, the assembled multitude also rose and joined their palms, collectively contemplating Amitabha Buddha.

In that instant, Amitabha Buddha displayed his immense supernatural power, emitting a brilliant light that illuminated Bodhisattva Mountain-Ocean Wisdom.

Just then, Bodhisattva Mountain-Ocean Wisdom and others witnessed all the magnificent and wondrous aspects of Amitabha Buddha’s Land: everything composed of the seven jewels, with mountains and the very land itself adorned with these jewels. The waters, birds and forests resonated with the sounds of the Dharma unceasingly. In that land, the Dharma wheel constantly turns, day after day. The inhabitants do not engage in matters outside the Buddha’s teachings but purely practice within such teachings. They speak in the language of the Mahayana, listen to the sounds that embody the Mahayana, and comprehend principles within the Mahayana.

Then, Bodhisattva Mountain-Ocean Wisdom spoke to the Buddha: “World-Honored One, today we have beheld the supreme, wondrous and unfathomable benefits of that land. I now wish for all sentient beings to be reborn there, and thereafter, we too aspire to be reborn in that land.”

The Buddha declared: “Through correct contemplation and correct mindfulness, practitioners achieve true liberation and will all be reborn in the Pure Land. If a good man or woman has firm

faith in this sutra, cherishes and delights in it, and inspires and guides others, both the speaker and the listeners will be reborn in Amitabha Buddha's Land. For such people, from this day forward, I will always ensure that twenty-five Bodhisattvas provide them protection, keeping them free from illness and worries, and safe from human and non-human adversaries. Whether they are walking, resting, sitting or lying down, regardless of the time, day or night, they will always enjoy peace and security.

Bodhisattva Mountain-Ocean Wisdom addressed the Buddha: "World-Honored One, I now wholeheartedly embrace your esteemed teachings and harbor no doubts. Yet, there are many beings in the world who may slander this sutra and disbelieve it. What will happen to them in the future?"

The Buddha responded to Bodhisattva Mountain-Ocean Wisdom: "In the future, in Jambudvīpa, there may be bhikkus and bhikkunis who, upon witnessing someone read or chant this sutra, will harbor anger and slander in their hearts. Due to their defamation of the correct Dharma, they will, in their current lives, endure various severe illnesses, lose their sensory faculties, and suffer from deafness, blindness, muteness, dropsy and ghostly hauntings. They will be unable to find peace, whether sitting or lying down. Desperately clinging to life yet barely surviving, they will wish for death but will not be able to die. Upon their death, they will descend into hell, enduring extreme torment for 80,000 kalpas. For hundreds of millions of lifetimes, they will not even hear the names of water and food.

After a long period, once they exit the hell, they will be reincarnated as cattle, horses, pigs and sheep, only to be slaughtered by humans and endure immense suffering. Subsequently, when reborn as humans, they will constantly live in the lowest societal positions. For hundreds of millions of lifetimes, they will never experience freedom, nor will they hear the names of the Three Gems. Therefore, it is not advisable to discuss this sutra with those who lack wisdom and faith.”

May the merit accrued from composing and circulating this
Collection

Be universally extended to all beings.

May we first awaken the Bodhi-mind,

Jointly aspire to rebirth in the Pure Land,

And finally attain the path of Buddhahood.



Afterword: Why Did Master Daochuo Cite Dubious Sutras in His *Collection on the Land of Peace and Joy*?

By Dharma Master Jingzong

The dissemination of Buddhist scriptures in China is a serious and solemn endeavor. The texts must be acquired from India and translated into Chinese before they are acknowledged as standard, canonical scriptures.

As Buddhism's influence expanded dramatically in China, the prevalence of spurious scriptures also increased. These are often referred to as "suspected apocryphal sutras." The term "suspected" denotes doubts about the authenticity of a scripture. They arise when historical records are incomplete, leaving the translator unnamed, or when the text's narrative and origins stir skepticism. Nevertheless, there is no definitive evidence of their falsity, so these texts are classified as "suspected apocryphal sutras."

"Apocryphal sutras" are texts definitively proven not to have originated from India but were instead formulated within China. There

are two types of “apocryphal” scripture. The first bears no relation to the principles of Buddhist teaching and is entirely nonsensical. Examples include the *Sutra of the Blood Bowl* and the *Sutra of the Blood Lake*. Pretending to be legitimate sutras, these texts misuse the Buddha’s name to sow confusion about his teachings.

The second type includes texts that, although not originating in India according to textual research, have principles that align with Buddhist teachings. The criteria for “aligning with Buddhist teachings” involve the “Three Dharma Seals”: formations are impermanent; dharmas are without self; nirvana is quiescent. Alternatively, the “One Dharma Seal” in Mahayana Buddhism, known as the singular seal of ultimate reality, applies. If a text aligns with either the Ultimate Reality Seal or the Three Dharma Seals as taught by the Buddha, it receives the Buddha’s endorsement. However, classifying it as a Buddhist sutra remains debatable, hence it is referred to as a suspected apocryphal sutra.

Why do spurious scriptures emerge? It is because Buddhist teachings are both flourishing and profound. These dubious texts generally arise under two circumstances. One is that they were authored by non-Buddhists who, coveting the brilliance and subtlety of Buddhism but lacking an understanding of its principles, fabricate texts filled with confusion and absurdity. Such pretensions of authenticity undermine the integrity of Buddhism. This phenomenon is similar to the counterfeiting of high-quality products; no one would bother to forge a product that is not well-known. Consequently, during the Sui and Tang dynasties, a significant number of such questionable scriptures appeared.

The other circumstance is of spurious scriptures produced by meddlers who have faith in Buddhism. The content of these dubious texts

aligns with Buddhist teachings; their intentions are beneficent, and they contribute positively to the dissemination of Buddhism. Moreover, among these texts, many focus on the Pure Land, signifying the fecundity of the Pure Land practice — many individuals were eager to compose their own versions to “ride the wave of popularity.”

The benefit of these apocryphal scriptures lies in their promotion of Buddhism and the enhancement of social behavior. Yet each culture possesses unique characteristics. As Buddhism spread to China, it naturally encountered the entrenched traditions of Chinese culture. Despite recognizing the value of Buddhist teachings, some Chinese harbored resistance due to Buddhism’s foreign origins. They questioned why their native sages, such as Pan Gu, who created the world, and Nü Wa, who mended the sky, were not mentioned in Buddhist teachings. To address these cultural sensitivities, some pondered the possibility of considering deities like Fu Xi and Nü Wa as manifestations of Bodhisattvas, thereby aligning them with the teachings of the Buddha for broader acceptance. This acknowledgment of revered Chinese figures within the Buddhist framework helped to ease cultural tensions and deepen the faith in Buddhist teachings.

From this perspective, the dubious scriptures functioned as a bridge. However, they were akin to “beating a drum on the side” — serving promotional purposes rather than representing authentic sutras. By claiming that Fu Xi and Nü Wa were Bodhisattvas Precious Response Voice and Precious Auspiciousness in the spurious *Four Quarters of Sumeru Sutra*, a significant momentum was generated. Once this momentum took hold, the public believed it, and it became accepted as fact.

Master Daochuo cited this scripture to leverage the influence of its popularity. At that time, the scripture was widely acclaimed, and most people trusted its authenticity. Not referencing it would have, paradoxically, raised suspicions. Master Daochuo was fully aware that it was not an authentic sutra, yet he chose to cite it. This approach is described as “Making the most of a mistake; for the sake of the Western Pure Land.”

Given its widespread acceptance, Master Daochuo employed the sutra as a reference. In ancient times, when scholarship was less developed, the general populace was not well versed in literary research. Only accomplished monastics, learned practitioners and specialized scholars had a true understanding. Therefore, why question its veracity openly? Since the scripture had utilitarian value, it was used with the intention of guiding the multitude to the Western Pure Land, where, upon arrival, all concerns would be resolved anyway. This was deemed sufficient.

Consider this analogy: There is a pond next to the Yangzi (Yangtze) River, but its water cannot reach the river directly. So we dig a ditch from the pond to the Yangzi and tell the pond water, “This ditch is the Yangzi.” Believing this, the water flows toward what it perceives as the river. As long as the water enters the ditch, it will reach the actual Yangzi. Although the ditch isn’t truly the Yangzi, we assert that it is to encourage the water’s journey. Once the water merges with the Yangzi, it recognizes its true destination and harbors no ill feelings about the earlier misunderstanding.

Similarly, texts like the *Four Quarters of Sumeru Sutra* are not real sutras. Yet, just as calling something that is not the Yangzi the

“Yangzi,” labeling a non-sutra a sutra ultimately doesn’t matter. As long as it effectively leads the water to the Yangzi, it is acceptable to claim that the ditch is the Yangzi. Therefore, it is crucial to acquire a proper understanding of these dubious scriptures, especially the reasons they are referenced by the lineage masters of the Pure Land School. Master Daochuo’s *Collection* not only cites one, but several questionable scriptures, including the *Four Quarters of Sumeru Sutra*, the *Sutra on Rebirth in the Ten Directions According to Wishes*, the *Sutra of Pure Deliverance by Bodhisattvas*, the *Respectable Sutra on Emperor Good King*, and the *Sutra on Sole Practice of Samadhi*, totaling five.

At that time, Master Daochuo was not the only one who cited dubious scriptures; Master Zhiyi of the Tiantai School did as well. As mentioned, such citations were strategically aligned with the customs, habit and conditions of the era. Importantly, the apocryphal scriptures referenced by these lineage masters were always in accordance with the principles of Buddhist sutras, specifically the Three Dharma Seals or the One Dharma Seal. The masters selectively cited texts that conformed to these principles; otherwise, they refrained from quoting them.

Referencing dubious scriptures is no longer necessary today. With the advancement of scholarship and the establishment of the Pure Land School, our “pond water” has already made its way through the small ditch to the Yangzi River, eliminating the need to describe the ditch as the Yangzi. This explanation might still be relevant for those who have not yet reached the Yangzi; for those who have, it is redundant. Nonetheless, to preserve the integrity of the original text, there is no need to remove this section from the *Collection*. It doesn’t matter, and serves as a historical record as well.

There are various reasons for concocting apocryphal scriptures. Some individuals create them for personal gain, aiming to enhance their reputation and secure private benefits, which is certainly objectionable. However, others may act with benevolent intentions, striving to influence public conduct and facilitate the path to the Western Pure Land. Master Daochuo was certainly aware of such dynamics. His references to these scriptures were a strategic exploitation of public opinion at the time.

— From “Talks on the *Collection on the Land of Peace and Joy*”

