
The Blind Old Woman Who Had Foreknowledge of Her Own Passing

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Preface

This is a case sample of rebirth that merits frequent reading, yielding new insights every time. Whenever one reads it, one will be filled with encouragement, joy and comfort. After reading it, Professor Qiu Dong Hou has written a review and printed a thousand copies to be distributed free to all, in the hope of delivering more suffering sentient beings to be reborn in Pure Land, together breaking the transmigration of life and death, in this Age of Dharma Decline. It is certainly true that when one sets one's mind, the lotus fragrance will be smelled and the joy of deliverance shared. The protagonist of this book, a blind senior, is no doubt such a lotus blossom from the Pure Land in this Saha world, emitting the extraordinary fragrance of rescue by Amitabha.

In order to introduce this marvelous lotus flower to the greater public and also to encourage all to become such a lotus flower, we now publish this account of her rebirth, in pamphlet form, with an annotation by Master Jingzong and review by Professor Hou.

A Blind Senior, with foreknowledge of her time, Cleans and dresses up to wait for Buddha serenely.

My 83-year old blind aunt had a rough and destitute life. Yet, when her time was up, she cleaned herself, and dressed up neatly and meritoriously. Alone, all by herself in the dead silence of a winter night, she was holding her prayer beads. Without any pain, she serenely followed Amitabha Buddha to her rebirth. Finally, she was rid of her misery and forever enjoyed peace and happiness. Is it too good to be true?

Surely, anyone learned about her whole life in hardship will sigh and feel sorry for her; and yet, anyone who saw her marvelous journey to rebirth will be moved and feel happy for her as well.

CHAPTER 1

A Life of Hardship

In 1925 my aunt, Lai Xiumei, was born in the town of Wanli, Miaoli County. She was the eldest sister of my father. As soon as she was born, my grandfather succumbed to an unknown and incurable illness. So, other family members took her to a fortune teller. The fortune teller said, "This little girl was born in crossed stars and carried with her a sickle and an iron sweeper. She was destined to harm her father when at home and her husband when married."

To be safe, the family must get rid of this "iron sweeper." Thus my poor aunt was destined to lead her life in hardship, distress and wandering. It seems to be the first episode in a play script.

When she was three, she was sent out to be a "child wife." Oddly enough, Grandpa recovered from his illness.

At 18 she was married to her first husband who was a

habitual gambler. He never held any job to support her.

At 25, her two young daughters were sold to pay this gambler's debts. When my aunt found out, she was furious and resolutely divorced her husband, took her only son and went back to her own family. However, due to the conservative moral view at that time -- divorce was shameful to the family -- Grandpa pushed her away. My father sympathized with her and took in her son, my cousin, and raised him. My aunt then went to Keelung by herself. There she worked as a house maid, cooking, cleaning and washing, to support herself, barely eking out a living.

At the age of 30, she married her second husband, a taxi driver. Yet, just 6 months later, her husband died in an automobile accident and was survived by her and an 8-year-old girl from his previous marriage.

Auntie left the city of sadness and went to work in a mining town of Ruifang. She raised the young girl, my eldest sister cousin.

At 35, she married her third husband, who was a miner. Before tying the nuptial knots, they lived together

for almost two years in which he treated my aunt well. Her miner husband had a 5-year-old daughter, my younger sister cousin, from a previous marriage. So, this new family of four lived happily for a while. However it did not last long. The explosion in the mine killed the miner husband.

As though heaven were playing a game with her, Auntie lost her third husband and started working as a house maid, cooking, cleaning and washing, to feed her two daughters, in loneliness and sorrow.

When she was 43, a go-between encouraged her to marry a man who was the First Mate in an ocean liner. The reasoning is that a seafarer is constantly absent from home, that they will not see each other for 6 months or a year, and that she would not bring "bad luck" to him. Auntie agreed to this logic. Moreover, she also rationalized that it is too hard to raise the girls by herself without a steady income and that she wanted a companion in her sorrowful life. Finally she gave in and wed the mariner. After the wedding, the First Mate treated her gently and was considerate. He brought her beautiful dresses from all over the world and even purchased a

house in the Yonghe district of Taipei County. Finally, Auntie felt that she could rest comfortably, a first in her life with a home. Subsequently, her eyesight, weakened from constant crying, stopped deteriorating.

In the year she was married, Auntie learned that Grandma passed away. After being abandoned for 40 years, she rushed home, trying to attend the funeral. And yet, because of the local customs, she was deemed not to be qualified to enter the house. She was kept outside and could only watch Grandma's funeral at a distance. Understandably, she grieved tremendously and cried loudly. (Later, when my 70-year old Grandpa passed away after an illness, Auntie came home for the funeral and was still not allowed to attend.)

The fact that she could not attend her own parents' funeral as a way of expressing filial piety was the most regrettable event in her life.

When Auntie was 60, after a contented marriage of 17 years, her First Mate husband retired. Yet, just 6 months after he finally settled down in Taiwan, he contracted acute hepatitis and abruptly passed away. Her short period of happiness also drew to an end.

After losing her fourth husband, my aunt started to blame herself. She was then 61. Daily, she cried incessantly. As a consequence, she lost her eyesight and lived in darkness, mired in sorrow, unable to extricate herself.

After my father made the suggestion, my younger sister cousin who had married but lived close by moved back to live with Auntie to take care of her. And yet, Auntie was buried deep in her misery due to the misfortunes of her life. Furthermore, she was in her old age, blind, and also suffered from chronic rheumatoid arthritis and diabetes. Day in and day out she complained, felt self-pity, unhappy about herself, her misfortunes, her illness. My cousin just could not handle it. So she moved out. Now the two sisters, my elder and younger cousins, took turns to take care of their poor mother. Each morning, one of them would bring in the daily meals and put them in the electric warmer. Auntie was blind and could not tell the time. She just took the meal portion and ate it whenever she felt hungry. My father and my two cousins called each day to check on her. Being completely blind, Auntie could only use her hands as her eyes, learned how to handle her daily activity,

cleaned herself, and made phone calls when necessary. It somehow became a regular routine and was agreeable to all.

CHAPTER 2

The Turning Point

In 1998, Auntie was already in her seventies. One day I went to visit her and consoled her, saying "Rest your heart, don't nag your daughters. They have their own families to take care of. I am giving you a device that plays Amitabha-recitation. Just an ordinary device. So, when you are at home doing nothing, just listen and follow the reciting, to get rid of your unnecessary stray thoughts."

After a certain period, my elder sister cousin, a non-Buddhist, called me to complain, "Amitabha-recitation is for families conducting a death ceremony. Mom is distressed already. When she listens to the reciting, she will feel more depressed."

However, I comforted my aunt, "Don't you worry about them. They came to visit you just occasionally. You just continue to recite."

In May, 2006, my father passed away. Auntie came to pay her respects. She cried sorrowfully, "He was such a kind and good person! How could he pass away before I? I am of crossed stars. I should have gone first!" She then banged her head against the coffin. I restrained her and said, "Auntie, my dad did not die. Instead he went to the Land of Bliss where he will be waiting for us." But Auntie did not believe me. I then sincerely told her, "Auntie, I am now giving you the Amitabha-recitation device, recorded by my teacher Master Huijing. It has a better tone and is easier to follow. When dad was on his sick bed, he followed the recitation all the time. Take it as a memorial present from dad. So long as you recite along, by the time it is your turn to go, Amitabha Buddha will appear. Dad will also come to guide you to the Land of Bliss." Auntie lightened up and said happily, "Great. I will definitely go to the Land of Bliss to be together with your father." After that, Auntie constantly recited Amitabha's name, day in and day out.

CHAPTER 3

Extraordinary Rebirth

From November 2009 onward, the whole family was puzzled by Auntie's behavior. It was only after she passed away that we realized she had been preparing for her own rebirth.

One day, Auntie called me, "How come you haven't come to see me in a while? Amitabha came to see me and wanted to take me home." Such strange words -- Amitabha Buddha came to see her, wanted to take her home -- really worried us, my cousins and me. We wondered if Auntie had succumbed to Alzheimer disease, since she was already 83 years of age. Or was it because it was close to the New Year that she just felt lonely (and wanted some attention)? Or was her sad life about to end? I made a suggestion to have my younger cousin take Auntie to see a psychiatrist. Yet the psychiatric diagnosis was normal. So she took Auntie to see an internist who also said she had no illness other than old ailments.

Auntie also said, "I am completely fine. Why did you girls take me to see doctors?" Furthermore, she scolded me, "It is you who told me to recite Amitabha Buddha's name. Now even you won't believe me."

Auntie soon asked my younger cousin to buy her new socks and shoes. Yet those purchased by younger cousin were not to her liking. So Auntie asked me to buy her some shoes made from cloth. Auntie was blind and suffered from diabetes for years. She could only wear socks and take some small steps at home. Why did she need cloth shoes? Disregarding my doubts, I bought her some embroidered cloth shoes and had my brother take them to her. When Auntie caressed the surface of the shoes and said, "Yes, this is the pair I wanted."

One day, Auntie told my cousin, "Take out the dress that I like most and put it on my bed so that I can wear it when it is my time." My cousin did as instructed.

Auntie then urged my brother cousin who lived in Kaohsiung to come back to see her as soon as possible. She said that if he did not come soon, it would be too late.

My brother cousin, a chef, was too busy in his work

due to the heavy bookings of wedding feasts at the end of the year. He could not come home. So Auntie asked me to call him, again and again. Finally, on December 6, brother cousin came home with his son who was about to get married and gave us the wedding invitation. Auntie said to brother cousin, "Amitabha will come to take me away soon. I have already told your sister to put the clothes I like to wear on my bed." Brother cousin said, "Can you put them on by yourself?" "Yes, I can," Auntie said. "After I am gone, please cremate me. Put my ashes with my brother. I leave the house to your youngest sister because she and her kids have been taking care of me. I leave my cash to your younger sister. Since you were raised by your uncle when you are very young, our relationship is not as close as with your sisters. I hope you don't mind that I have made such arrangements in distributing my estate." My nephew who accompanied my brother cousin is Auntie's direct grandson, and was getting married in December. He merrily said to Auntie, "Grandma, I'll put you on the Host Honor Seat in my wedding feast." Auntie said, "It will be too late. I am going away with Amitabha Buddha. But I will come visit you during the wedding ceremony." After hearing such a conversation my sister-in-law felt a bit uneasy and

unhappy since a wedding is a happy event. What Auntie said was not auspicious and might even bring bad luck.

In the morning of December 8, I received a call from my younger sister cousin. She said, "As usual, I went to Mom's to deliver the daily meals. I found her lying in her bed, wearing the dress she specified. She had stopped breathing." I instructed her not to disturb her and to have all family members do Amitabha-recitation, following the device. I would be there in a minute. But my younger sister cousin said, "My religion isn't Buddhism." I replied, "That you don't burn incense sticks I can understand. However, Amitabha-recitation does not require you to burn incense either. It should be all right."

When I arrived, I was moved to tears by what I saw. Auntie had combed herself neatly, wore that beautiful dress, holding tightly on her chest the prayer beads I gave her. She had on the new socks and the embroidered shoes. She lay quietly in her bed with serenity. Now it finally dawned on me that what Auntie said before was the truth. Amitabha came to receive her when he heard his name being recited and guided her to be united with my father in the Land of Bliss.

When the whole family was puzzled by her previous words about Amitabha coming to receive her, only Auntie firmly believed in it. When the entire family suspected she had Alzheimer's disease -- saying things everyone thought were from a person with dementia -- only Auntie knew that Amitabha was with her all the time. She was sane and said what she saw -- the truth. When the whole family thought she was behaving oddly, only Auntie knew she was preparing for her last trip to the Pure Land with Amitabha Buddha. Under circumstances that no one understands, Auntie has arranged everything, including her trip costumes. She put on her prettiest dress and made herself up neatly, for she wanted to be in the most solemn manner to quietly receive Amitabha in her last moment, as if saying, "I have no one reciting for me, no one with me, no one understanding or supporting me. I am just an old blind woman, maybe senile as some might think. However, tonight, I will be going to the Pure Land with Amitabha Buddha. How lucky I am !" I believed this must have been Auntie's last thought. Certainly, Auntie never had the concept of assisted recitation, yet the way she left with Amitabha Buddha was so natural. It just happened. At last, in this dead silence of a winter night, without anyone's knowledge, Amitabha, together with

all the great Bodhisattvas and the sacred beings from the Ocean Assembly, came to Auntie and welcomed her to the Pure Land. The ceremony must have been boisterous, sending thunderous resonance into the Dharma realm, yet also quiet and motionless, unknown to sentient beings. Only those who recite Amitabha's name will be with him; only those who are with Amitabha are fearless, unshakably courageous. This is what my blind Auntie has been! She shames us all and will be deeply revered.

Although my assisted recitation was a belated effort, I continued because I felt that I could be with Auntie in the process. At this moment, the young and the old from the family, all knelt in front of her bed and started reciting Amitabha's name, accompanied by the device. Among them, my younger sister cousin and her husband recited the loudest. Our assisted recitation continued for twelve hours.

Auntie's life had been full of sorrow. She was cast out by her parents when young. When she returned home after her divorce, again she was cast away. Even when her parents passed away, she was not allowed to exercise her filial piety by attending the funerals.

She had four marriages: the first one was to a gambler whom she divorced, the second to a man who died in a car accident, her third husband passed away in a mine explosion, and the fourth succumbed to acute hepatitis. She raised five children: 2 daughters by her were sold, 2 girls from her husbands' previous marriages, one son by her was raised by her brother. In her twilight years, she was in poor health, blind for many years. Her whole life was full of departures and misfortunes. Luckily she had a kind younger brother who sympathized with her and introduced her to Buddhism.

Auntie was illiterate. She never took refuge in Buddhism nor did she become a vegetarian. The only motive in her Amitabha-recitation was simply to be reborn in the Land of Bliss to be reunited with her younger brother whom she missed all the time. She just vowed to go to the Land of Bliss, where they would be united. She did not understand the true meaning of reciting Amitabha Buddha's name. However, because of the immeasurable virtuous power of the great vow, she was reborn in the Land of Bliss. Not only did she fulfill her wish, she was also freed from the cycle of rebirth and became a Bodhisattva in a short time. Her rebirth

was enough to show that the Dharma path of Amitabha-recitation is simple, easy and yet extraordinary in effect.

In conclusion, I'd like to quote two passages from Dharma talks, as well as my deep feeling about my aunt's foreknowledge of her own time.

1. Master Tanluan's *Commentary on the Treatise of Rebirth*:

The name of the Tathagata of Unimpeded Light
Illuminates the darkness of ignorance
And fulfills the wishes of all sentient beings.

2. Master Shandao's teaching:

The name is the cause,
The light the assistant karma.
Like seeds, rain and dew
Fall into the consciousness field of all.
They germinate into sprouts of acceptance and
faith,
The stalk of exclusive recitation,
And the fruit of rebirth.

-- Narrated by Jingxiu and edited by Master Jingzong on
December 29, 2009

Annotation by Master Jingzong:

Has this old woman suffered a lot? Surely she has, and more than most people.

Has she any high position? No, she has not. She was made a child-wife at 3, fed herself by cooking and washing for others, standing at the lowest level.

Has she been well educated? No, she is illiterate.

Does she have a deep understanding of the sutras and the doctrines? No, she even does not know the meaning of Amitabha.

Does she practice a lot? No, she knows none other than reciting Amitabha Buddha's name.

Has she been reciting for long? No, initially she just listened to the reciting from the machine and began reciting, alone, for three and a half years.

Has she been reciting diligently and vigorously? Not

really. She was in her eighties, weakened both physically and psychologically, like a falling arrow, blind and sick, alone. She can hardly take care of her body, not to mention any diligent reciting.

Has she ever extinguished her afflictions? No, she cannot live peacefully with her two daughters, not to mention extinguishing affliction.

Has she ever excelled in reciting? Not really. She just repeats the reciting by Master Huijing, word by word, in the morning and in the evening.

Has she obtained a pure mind through recitation? No, she is still troubled by worldly matters.

Did she resolve to achieve *bodhicitta* (gaining enlightenment to help others)? No, she did not know what is *bodhicitta*. She just wanted to go to the Land of Bliss to be with her brother.

As ordinary as she was, has she been reborn? Yes, in an extraordinary manner.

First, it is remarkable to have foreknowledge of her

passing. She said "Amitabha came to see me and would take me home," months beforehand.

Second, it is remarkable to be constantly guarded by Amitabha Buddha. She sensed and said Amitabha came to see her.

Third, it is extraordinary not to be disturbed by others. She stood steadfast even though no one believed what she said.

Fourth, it is extraordinary to have a bonding with Amitabha Buddha. With this bonding in her heart, she would not be swayed by others.

Fifth, it is unusual to have good order. She has arranged everything before her time, orderly and properly.

Sixth, it is remarkable that she bothered no one. She has not troubled any other since no one believed her. She finished making arrangements and followed Amitabha Buddha to be reborn the next day. Could she have achieved this without great confidence?

Seventh, it is extraordinary to be reborn without assisted reciting. She knew nothing about assisted

reciting. To her, it was just natural to recite Amitabha's name and he would come receive her. Most people who have practiced for years still worry about the situation when their time is up. They will request a crowd of monks, nuns and fellow practitioners to conduct assisted reciting. Now put them side by side, who is better?

Eighth, it is extraordinary to be calm and unburdened: just imagine a blind senior in her eighties who combed herself, put on a new dress, wore new socks and shoes, held her prayers beads, lay on the bed, recited Amitabha Buddha's name and waited serenely for Amitabha to come. To remain calm and undisturbed is rather difficult even in normal situation; it requires time and effort in practice, not to mention when one is facing death. When it is the time to be reborn, with just a slight fluctuation and confusion of mind, one will not have such serenity. Calm and relaxed, she dressed herself and quietly waited for Amitabha Buddha; or perhaps she requested a few seconds to prepare after Amitabha arrived. Even though we will never know the details, meeting Amitabha Buddha is still extraordinary. Actually when she was in resonance with Amitabha, it did not matter whether she waited for him or asked him to wait for her.

Ninth, it is remarkable to be distinctly mindful: she was so calm and peaceful, holding her prayer beads close to her heart, and was reborn in her Amitabha-recitation. This surely guarantees she will become "awakened."

Tenth, it is super to be a surprise: normally we concentrate on famous people, in high positions and very learned, like the president of a Buddhism society, venerable monks and grand masters, hoping that some unusual events would appear in rebirth so as to encourage their disciples and to help propagate Buddhism. And yet, this rarely happens, disappointing everyone. But now this episode. No one looks up to this blind old woman, no one believes her and no one knows she would be reborn in such a style. Yet she became a testimonial to the truth that belief in the Dharma will definitely be rewarded. She has achieved, effortlessly, what those masters and monks who have been revered by thousands cannot achieve. Isn't this a great surprise? The Dharma is profound and unfathomable to ordinary people. Perhaps what the famous monks did not achieve and what this blind old lady did were manifestations by Bodhisattvas. If it were true, it would definitely be food for thought.

When an 80-year-old lady who is illiterate, does not know the doctrine, or how to practice, or what is an enlightened mind, has no "pure heart," ever harassed and agonized, deemed not to be vigorous in practice, only a short period in reciting, blind for many years, and has never been a vegetarian, she somehow acquires such an extraordinary rebirth. Such an event will definitely touch us, excite us and make us envious. Now shouldn't we also ask ourselves: How on earth did she achieve this?

Did she do so by what she has? She possessed nothing like that. She really has nothing whatsoever, by our common understanding. What she has are: 1. The promise of Amitabha 's Fundamental Vow, and 2. Her exclusivity of recitation.

To ordinary people, all accumulated knowledge, wisdom, practice, virtues are proudly considered our merits, a part of our intrinsic worth. Yet all are useless and unreliable in the face of death. What is really dependable is Amitabha's Fundamental Vow and one's own exclusivity of recitation -- both of which she possessed. Consequently, her intrinsic worth pervaded the universe and was timeless, permeating the Dharma World

and penetrating everyone's mind and body. That is why she can surpass all others.

Of these two points, Amitabha's Fundamental Vow -- equal for all beings -- cannot be considered her special merit. It is her exclusivity that allows her to surpass all others.

She, a blind old, illiterate woman, knows no self-cultivation practices. All she knows is Amitabha-recitation. Yes, Amitabha-recitation, with total exclusivity. Being simple and not multifarious, she does not know any other way in her own mind. Furthermore, no one respects her enough to teach her sundry practices. As a result, she does not have in her mind any confused thought, or any varied ways of practice. All she knows is to recite Amitabha's name. All she has is a single method -- one mind, one effort at reciting the name of Amitabha Buddha, according to his Fundamental Vow.

She is old and does not have too many mundane dealings. So she has a lot of free time. If she does not occupy herself by reciting Amitabha's name, her mind will run wild. She stays at home all the time and lacks social activity. The only sound she hears daily, other

than her daughters' greetings, are the recitations from the recitation device. So she is reciting without reciting. She recites and has her meals, has her meals and recites. To her there is no day time, no night time, just recitation time. She recites not diligently or idly since she has no such concept of diligence or negligence. To smart people, the way she has been reciting is foolish, thoughtless and purposeless.

She does not know the time and cannot tell day or night, yet knows clearly and in advance the exact hour Amitabha will come for her. So she prepares herself, minute by minute, as if in a countdown. Although we can tell exactly the minute and second of day and night, we do not know the time Amitabha will come. We just pass the time, day by day. Compared with her, who is the one who really knows the time -- time that has true meaning?

A lineage master once said that "With single-minded practice, ten out of ten will be reborn, and a hundred out of a hundred. With mixed practice, not one out of a thousand will be reborn." Strictly speaking, the old woman's extraordinary rebirth should not be considered beyond expectation; rather, it's only right and proper. If

a person like her who has such exclusivity in practice cannot be reborn, there will not be a single soul who can. If a person like her who has such dedication in reciting does not have an extraordinary rebirth, not one will have one. Her rebirth is not her own accomplishment but Amitabha's. It is simply due to her inability; she just complies with Amitabha to finish his work. Since it is Amitabha's work, it can only be perfect and extraordinary. This is merely the "spontaneous, natural way of things."

Because of her exclusivity, she can foretell her time of passing. Her absolute sincerity engenders her absolute exclusivity.

Because of her exclusivity, she is constantly protected by Amitabha Buddha. So long as a sentient being commits to Amitabha-recitation, the light of Amitabha's mind will always shine upon and protect that person. It is never said to shine on those who undertake mixed practices.

Because of her exclusivity, she is not troubled by others. Without multifarious distractions, her thinking is correct.

Because of her exclusivity, her heart and mind resonate with those of Amitabha Buddha, and she is in tune with his Fundamental Vow.

Exclusivity will give rise to an assured mind. With exclusivity, ten out of ten and a hundred out of a hundred will be reborn.

With exclusivity, she needs no assisted recitation. Exclusive recitation of Amitabha's name is the karma of assurance. With rebirth in the Pure Land assured in the present lifetime, she can prepare herself before her time.

Exclusivity brings forth inner peace and a serene mind. When a person recites Amitabha's name, Amitabha reciprocates. When one is devoted to Amitabha, the Buddha knows it.

Exclusivity engenders clear and correct mindfulness. When one is dedicated to Amitabha Buddha, he transforms and dispatches his emanations to welcome them to the Pure Land.

Exclusivity produces surprises. All positive karma and merit of the present life are not comparable to the recitation of Amitabha's name.

The Amitabha-recitation of this blind old woman is a textbook example of how the sutras and other Buddhist scriptures are brought to life by ordinary people, through factual happenings. She knew only Amitabha-recitation, not the sutras or other texts. Yet she embodies the unlimited marvelous meaning. She has become a testimonial to the saying that "The entire Tripitaka is but a footnote to the six-syllable recitation of 'Namo Amitabha'."

It is said that "profound learning in sutras means unfathomable wisdom." However, each person has his own way of studying the sutras and his own interpretation of wisdom. A person who is rich in learning and highly talented, and understands the Triptaka sutras and the profound teachings of the eight Dharma schools, is always deemed wise. However, when that person becomes confused and dazed in his final hours, can he still be considered wise? On the other hand, an illiterate and uneducated person who knows nothing of Dharma teachings except to recite the six syllables of Amitabha's name, is judged by everyone to be ignorant and stupid. But if such a person, like this blind old lady, can become a Buddha, we would rather have her ignorance.

Now allow me to quote respectfully from our lineage masters in the context of this blind old lady's extraordinary rebirth:

1. The Land of Bliss is a realm of unconditioned nirvana;

It's hard to be reborn there by practicing assorted virtues according to circumstances.

The Tathagata selects the key method –

He teaches us to recite Amitabha's name with two-fold exclusivity.

2. All Dharmas are liberation -- None surpasses that of Amitabha-recitation for rebirth in the Western Pure Land.

Spending a life time reciting or up to ten utterances,

Or even five or three recitations, the Buddha will come to receive.

Indeed, Amitabha's great vow enables

Common beings to be reborn just by reciting.

3. Though all practices indirectly lead to rebirth,

The practice of Amitabha-recitation is the most superb.

4. Regardless of the time, calamity or blessing,

Just set your heart on Amitabha-recitation, giving no rise to doubt.

5. Amitabha's name is the sharp sword of power and wisdom,

Just reciting out loud will eradicate all karmic offenses.

6. Amitabha's light shines everywhere,

But embraces only those who recite.

7. Only those who recite will receive the light of Amitabha;

All should know that his Fundamental Vow is the most powerful.

8. Amitabha's light seeks not those with miscellaneous karma,

Only those who recite and aspire to rebirth.

9. Beam after beam, Amitabha's light shines

Upon those who recite and aspire to rebirth.

10. Bathed in Amitabha's light, karmically connected beings

Develop wisdom and are reborn in the Pure Land.

11. The karmically connected are urged to recite Amitabha's name often;

Avalokitesvara and Mahasthamaprapta are both fellow learners.

12. Those who recite are the best of men;

Together they wish to be born together into the Buddhist family.

13. We should recite continually,

Holding fast to exclusivity till the end of our life.

14. Exclusively recite Amitabha's name all life long --

And the Buddha will come receive you when life ends.

15. At the time of death, properly reciting Amitabha's name,

We see the Buddha's compassionate light shining on our body.

Riding on the power of the Fundamental Vow,

We instantly enter the Pure Land's hall of treasures.

16. In the space of a thought, we enter into the assembly of Buddhas,

Where all bodies, form and lifespans are all equal.

By Jingzong, January 2010

Afterword:

This account, "A Blind Old Lady," is truly a splendid narrative of rebirth in the Pure Land, rarely encountered. After reading it, I was deeply moved. I resolved to print 1,000 copies, with some donations on hand, to distribute them to all fellow practitioners to make karmic connections. I hope the public will copy, print and circulate many more copies. That way, a great many more suffering sentient beings will be reborn in the Western Pure Land and escape the transmigration of life and death, especially in this particular time of dwindling Dharma.

What moves me most is Amitabha's compassion when he gave new hope to this 83-year-old blind lady, who has known nothing but hardship in her whole life. In her niece's smooth-flowing account, we saw a sampler of sufferings when she banged her head against the coffin, but Amitabha Buddha saved her -- a blessing in her unfortunate life. From a Buddhist viewpoint, this blind old lady is a suffering ordinary being with a heavy karmic burden. If not for Amitabha's deliverance, she would

have passed away miserable and lonely, entering her next stage of transmigration. In this account, we witness the incomparable splendor of the Pure Land path.

The teachings of Pure Land are "difficult to believe." The more educated people are, the less they tend to accept it. This attitude is more widespread among scientists, scholars, professors and those with PhDs. When I was in college from 1963 to 1967, I was in the same situation. For about three full years, I read the distributed Buddhist sutras and magazines by Zheng Zhi University's Eastern Culture Society, wrote a few essays on Buddhism, compared Western and Eastern philosophy and, most importantly, pondered deeply. I finally came to the conclusion that Buddhism is the most exalted and practical philosophy. By this time I was a senior in college. However, I was still not a firm believer in Pure Land.

Then I went to graduate school, graduated from it, became a lecturer in an education institute and an adviser to its Buddhism Society, as well as a lecturer in the History of Chinese Philosophy in the department of languages. In the meantime, I continued to research

and study Buddhist sutras and events relating to rebirth, under the umbrella of Pure Land. In another ten-plus years, I finally believed in the teachings of Amitabha-recitation, the Western Land of Bliss and the existence of Amitabha. Taking myself as an example, we can infer that the majority of the highly educated have difficulty to accept and believe in the extraordinary power of the six-syllable "Namo Amitabha," and thus will not practice Amitabha-recitation. Reciting Amitabha's name is a path that's "hard to believe" -- in the words of Shakyamuni Buddha himself, in the Amitabha Sutra. Most people do not believe in Amitabha Buddha or rebirth in the Land of Bliss, not to mention becoming Buddhas themselves, capable of delivering sentient beings. So we believers need not condemn them too much.

In retrospect, I am in great debt to Master Hong Guan, Master Hong Yi, Practitioner Xuan-De Zhou, Practitioner Bing-Nan Li, Master Chan Gong, Master Jian Yin and all past sages of Pure Land in our history. Without their advocacy and true practices, I would not have such a longing in my heart for the Pure Land.

Because of my personal karma, I have taught full-

time for 25 years and at the same time was a Chinese herbalist for 20 plus years. After I retired from my professorship, I lectured on sutras for more than ten years in my own home. For all these years, my personal goal in life has been set to "Die without disease and be reborn in the Pure Land." I have been promoting it and encouraging my fellow practitioners to aim for the same. Although it is not easy to realize fully, the idea of "suffering from light disease, and to be reborn in the Pure Land without suffering too much" should not be too difficult to achieve. Accordingly, I have been promoting the healthy vegetarian diet, taking Western medicine as little as possible and using more Chinese herbal medicine instead, and diligently promoting Qigong practice. Based on years of clinical experiments, those who suffer from chronic and/or acute diseases might be cured slowly, though not completely, if they practice with determination the above guidelines. The diseases include influenza, hypertension, diabetes, cardiovascular, asthma, gastrointestinal ailments, rheumatoid arthritis, liver disease, kidney disease, even malignant and benign tumors.

Even so, when a person is strenuously seeking good health in order to prolong physical life, on the basis of the

Dharma he might be suspected of overemphasizing "this existence," which can be deemed a kind of attachment and thus a vexation. So, it is better to live easily and comfortably. Just keep in mind the cause and effect of time: when it is time to be reborn, go ahead. Don't fall in love with this human world so much as to cling to the position one has in this dusty world. What earthly reason is there to cling to this life?

Most people who can move around, eat and drink without digestive problems, sleep soundly and have enough money and time, they will take leisure trips and enjoy delicacies from time to time. It is very rare for them to regard their life lightly or be disillusioned with the suffering of the defiled realm. In fact, good health can increasingly enhance people's desire to live longer, so they have no wish to be reborn. Amid agreeable circumstances, to realize everything is impermanent, illusory and unreal requires great wisdom -- *prajna* wisdom. This wisdom comes from studying and practicing according to the Mahayana scriptures, penetrating the surface and grasping the essence, and reflecting often on worldly phenomena.

The wonder of Pure Land teaching is this: just reciting the six-syllable name "*Namo Amitabha Buddha*" naturally contains within it great compassion, enormous wisdom and the immense power of Amitabha Buddha. Sincere recitation of his sacred name is like a baby sucking on its mother's milk, nourishing daily his inner Buddha Nature, and incessantly breeding compassion and wisdom, without resorting to exhaustive study of the Mahayana scriptures. Just look at the case of this old lady. She is illiterate and knows neither sutras nor scriptures, but she believes in Amitabha Buddha and recites his name, and has faith that there is a Land of Bliss and that her younger brother has gone there. Accordingly, she lets go of everything and fears not the disturbances of her illness. She single-mindedly recites Amitabha's name. Such behavior is certainly an expression of immense wisdom.

A month before her passing, Amitabha visited her often, told her about her date of rebirth, and allowed her ample time to prepare her clothes, socks and shoes. When the time came, she combed herself, put on her dress, socks and shoes and lay down peacefully, awaiting rebirth. Let's ask ourselves: "If she were suffering and in

distress, would she have achieved such a serene rebirth?" By contrast, others struggle in unfathomable ways when facing death. What a difference -- a world apart!

This story of the rebirth in the Pure Land of this old blind lady is truly admirable and enviable. Since ancient times, there has been countless exciting stories about rebirth. As we read more such stories, our faith in rebirth in the West is constantly strengthened. We joyfully recite Amitabha's name, do good readily, rid ourselves of mundane disputes, and feel great ease of mind.

Modern human beings neither restrain their desires nor practice austerity as they pursue materialism. We have created an unstoppable environmental disaster -- the greenhouse effect of global warming, a consequence of our indulgence in greed. The future of mankind is not optimistic, and catastrophe may lurk just around the corner. Amitabha-recitation and rebirth in the Pure Land have become the only way out. I hope this publication will help our society cultivate an ethical atmosphere of believing in the Buddhas and reciting Amitabha's name, so that more people can achieve ultimate liberation .

By Qiudong Hou, March 22, 2010

Gatha of Dedication:

May the resulting merit be distributed everywhere without discrimination. May we all aspire to perfect enlightenment for the sake of other beings, and be reborn in the Land of Peace and Joy.