



**The Buddha Speaks of the Infinite
Life Sutra of Adornment, Purity,
Equality and Enlightenment of
the Mahayana School**



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Chapter 1:

The Assembly of Sages Attend the Dharma Teaching

All the teachings given by Buddha Shakyamuni were based upon true reality. Venerable Ánanda learned and memorized all the teachings from Buddha Shakyamuni.

Observing that the opportunity is near for a certain number of people to attain Buddhahood, the Buddha then started this Pure Land teaching.

It was in the city of Rajagriha, on the mountain Gridhrakuta, that an assembly of twelve thousand of the Buddha's great Bhikshus (monks), together with those great Bodhisattvas, attended this teaching.

Buddha Shakyamuni played a leading character while other Buddhas were supporting characters, with some as his students. When Buddha Shakyamuni appeared in this world, their role-playing helped to educate all beings.

Venerable Kondanna was the first one to actualize the achievement of an Arhat from the Buddha's teachings. His presence at this teaching represents that the Infinite Life Sutra is the foremost teaching for all Buddhas in helping sentient beings to escape the cycle of birth and death.

Venerable Shariputra was the student foremost in wisdom. One who can believe this sutra and put this teaching into practice will attain foremost wisdom.

Venerable Maha Maudgalyayana was the foremost in spiritual penetrations. Once one is reborn into the Western Pure Land and later becomes a Buddha, aided by Amitabha, one recovers this foremost innate power.

Maha is a Sanskrit word meaning great.

The first Patriarch in the Zen school was Venerable Mahakashyapa who also attended this meeting.

Venerable Ānanda did the primary work of compiling the Buddha's teachings into sutras.

For one to become a left-home person, one must have planted good roots in past lives. One time Buddha Shakyamuni tested his student's ability to decide whether to accept an old man who had requested to become a monk. An Arhat is capable of knowing a being's past lifetimes over many lifetimes. All of the Buddha's Arhat students doomed the old man as a prospect, because they thought that he had no connection with Buddhism in his past lives. Buddha Shakyamuni then announced that many aeons ago, this old man was a woodchopper. One day when he ran into a tiger on the mountain, he climbed up a tree to escape, calling out, "Homage to the Buddha" for help. With only those few words, the old man planted his good roots. In this life, he became a monk as he had wished and later attained his Arhat-ship.

The Buddha gave this Pure Land teaching as a special way to help beings in this Dharma Ending Age.

For one to be able to accept the Pure Land teaching, one must have previously nurtured countless good roots.

The attendance of the great Samantabhadra Bodhisattva at this teaching symbolized the unity of the Pure Land and Esoteric Schools.

The presence of the great Manjusri Bodhisattva symbolized the integration of the Zen and Pure Land Schools.

Both of these Venerable's represent that all the teachings of the Buddha are contained within this sutra.

The name of "Amitabha" is in itself a supreme mantra. By chanting this name and vowing to go to the Western Pure Land, one can attain the utmost achievement: to be born into the Western Pure Land and become a Buddha within one lifetime.

The great Maitreya Bodhisattva is currently in the Tusita Deva (a level in heaven). After 5,706,000,000 years, he will appear in the human realm and become the next Buddha in this world.

In our current aeon, one thousand Buddhas will appear in our world. Buddha Shakyamuni was the fourth; Maitreya Bodhisattva will be the fifth. All these great sages came to this teaching as well.

Chapter Two:

The Virtues of Samantabhadra Bodhisattva Were Followed By All

It is stated in the Flower Adornment Sutra that if one does not cultivate Samantabhadra Bodhisattva's virtue, one cannot achieve the perfect awakening of enlightenment.

The Western Pure Land is the ultimate destination for practicing Samantabhadra Bodhisattva's Ten Great Vows.

Many great Bodhisattvas, appearing as lay persons, attended this teaching. The first was "Worthy and Protective" Bodhisattva, the only one from our Saha (Skt) world. His name teaches us that the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas always protect and help those who sincerely generate their Bodhi mind, the great compassionate mind to help all beings.

"Skillful in Contemplation" and "Wise and Eloquent" Bodhisattvas represent true understanding. In Buddhism, if one does not have true understanding, one cannot believe this sutra. Every sutra tells us that the time required for an ordinary being to become a Buddha is three great Asankhya aeons, an incalculably long amount of time. However, in this Pure Land teaching, three great Asankhya aeons can be transcended by a single thought of Buddha Amitabha.

"Observation of Non-Dwelling" Bodhisattva reminds us of the teaching from the Diamond Sutra, "One's mind should not attach to anything, then the true mind will arise."

"Spiritual Penetration Flower" Bodhisattva teaches us that many different abilities can be used to help sentient beings as he pledged in his vows.

"Light Emitting" Bodhisattva symbolizes the light of wisdom. Chanting Buddha's name will help us generate this limitless light.

"Precious Flag" Bodhisattva stands for how precious the opportunity is to help all beings through the Buddha's teachings. In the past, people would raise a flag from a pole in front of a Buddhist teaching center, which signaled that a lecture would be given that day.

"Utmost Wisdom" Bodhisattva illustrates that infinite wisdom is within this Pure Land teaching.

"Stilled Root" Bodhisattva demonstrated purification of the six sense organs (eye, ear, nose, tongue, mind, and body). Practicing according to the Buddha's teachings naturally purifies these six sense organs.

"Faith and Wisdom" Bodhisattva clarified that, without wisdom, one cannot believe in this teaching.

"Vow and Wisdom" Bodhisattva told us that, after unwavering belief is developed, it is important to vow to go to the Western Pure Land. From true wisdom comes the vow.

The elephant was the strongest animal to haul vehicles in ancient times. So the name of "Fragrant Elephant" Bodhisattva is a way to show us how great the benefit is to chant the Buddha's name.

"Treasury Revelation" Bodhisattva taught us that after one goes to the Western Pure Land, with the help of Buddha Amitabha, the treasury in one's self-nature will be uncovered.

"Dwelling in the Middle" Bodhisattva represents how one's mind should be set on the practice in the middle path, avoiding the extremes.

"Practice of Restraint" Bodhisattva advocated two points in the Pure Land School; following the precepts and Buddha-name chanting. Following the precepts disciplines one's thought, speech and behavior.

"Liberation" Bodhisattva was the last of the sixteen great guests of honor. He represented the result one attains from this practice: to be freed from worry and to attain liberation from the cycle of birth and death.

The first fourteen Bodhisattvas teach us to recognize this Buddha Name Chanting method and the Infinite Life Sutra, illustrating their importance in uncovering our true wisdom.

The fifteenth Bodhisattva represents our actual transformation by correcting erroneous ways in thought, speech and behavior.

The sixteenth and the last of the Bodhisattvas symbolized the final outcome of the entire practice.

All of those who attended this teaching followed the "Ten Great Vows" of Samantabhadra. The characteristics of this Bodhisattva are having a great compassionate mind and tirelessly fulfilling his vows.

The first great vow of Samantabhadra Bodhisattva is to "Pay respect to all the Buddhas." Respect is to be paid to both sentient and non-sentient beings, even to inanimate objects, since all essentially have a Buddha-nature.

Cultivating respect can help to subdue a person's arrogance and learn humility.

The second vow is to "Praise 'Thus Come One.'" "Thus Come One" is one's true nature. Things that correspond with one's true mind can be praised. Those that do not correspond with one's true mind are to be respected, but not praised.

One needs to have true wisdom to praise others. With this wisdom, one is able to differentiate between proper and deviated, right and wrong, to praise the good and proper teachings, and not to praise the deviated ones.

The third vow is to "Make offerings extensively." In Buddhism, the distinction between offering and giving is that offering is a form of giving or contribution with respect whereas, giving is not necessarily done with respect. When making offerings, one does so with a compassionate mind, a pure mind and a mind of equality for all beings, because everyone possesses a Buddha nature.

The fourth vow is to "Repent of karmic obstacles." Karma, cause and effect, results from thought, speech and behavior of aeons past. Karmic retribution, arising from former wrong thought, speech and behavior, blocks wisdom, virtue and talent within our self-nature.

Repenting of karmic obstacles and the ensuing reduction of karma begins with an immediate end to wrong thought, speech and behavior.

One then should not attach to either good or bad deeds, because good karma would have one go to the upper three realms (heavens, Asuras and humans), and bad karma to the lower three realms (animals, hungry ghosts and hells). However, whichever way, we are still mired in reincarnation.

Accumulating Pure Karma is a goal of a Pure Land practitioner. Rather than resulting in reincarnation, Pure Karma leads the practitioner to birth into the Pure Land.

The fifth vow is to "Be joyful over other's meritorious deeds." Jealousy and arrogance present serious obstacles for one to overcome, not only in the pursuit of worldly progress, but even more so for one on the path to enlightenment. When others accumulate merits, one should be happy and want to help them, thus, one's jealousy is overcome.

The sixth vow is to "Appeal to the Buddha to turn the wheel of Buddha's teaching." Buddhists should request all Buddhas, Bodhisattvas and venerable masters to give teachings for the benefit of all beings.

The seventh vow is to "Request the Buddha to reside in this world." Presently there is no Buddha in our world. If there is any venerable master who has

achieved attainment, we should try to have him/her remain with us; so more beings can benefit from his/her teaching.

The eighth vow is to "Constantly be a diligent follower of the Buddha's teaching." For a Pure Land practitioner, the Infinite Life Sutra is the Buddha's guideline for one's thought, speech and behavior.

The ninth vow is to "Accord with all sentient beings." Filial piety is the heart of this vow. Wisdom and serenity are required for one to be patient with others. True conformation derives from one's Bodhi Mind.

The tenth vow is to "Dedicate all merits." All merits should be dedicated to beings and inanimate objects, existing everywhere in the universe and beyond, which in reality is our Bodhi Mind.

Samantabhadra Bodhisattva said that his great vows could be perfectly accomplished only in the Western Pure Land. Therefore, he wished all those who suffer within all the realms in all the worlds of the ten directions, to quickly obtain birth into the Pure Land.

One is to be mindful of the name "Amitabha," for this name enables one to reflect and intensify the same merits and virtues, thus eventually achieving a Buddha's perfection.

All attending this assembly wanted themselves and all beings to accept this Pure Land teaching and that all could reach the Buddha's state of perfection.

Out of their great compassionate nature of first wanting to help all sentient beings escape suffering; Bodhisattvas perfect their wisdom and virtues.

Today, people might ask, "why should we help others?" They do not understand the true reality of life and the universe, thinking others and they are not one, so why should they help? This is similar to one's left hand being bitten by a mosquito. Would the right hand help to shoo away the mosquito or would it ask, "why should I help the left hand, it isn't me?" As worldly people, we have deluded thoughts and behavior, not realizing that all sentients and we are one being.

Wandering thoughts and attachments arise when one strays away from the truth; thus, deluded beings differentiate themselves from others. Knowing that others and self are an inseparable entity, the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas also understand that "helping others is helping oneself."

It is said in the Surangama Sutra that, "Buddhas and Bodhisattvas respond specifically to each person's appeal due to the differences in the minds of all beings." For example, they may appear as Avalokiteshvara Bodhisattva, if that is the form the individual would most willingly accept.

When a Bodhisattva in this world is ready to attain perfect realization, he goes through the same eight phases to instruct the world. Usually this Bodhisattva is called a "Next Buddha to Be."

If a Bodhisattva is a "Next Buddha to Be" he lives in and descends from Tusita Heaven to the human realm where he will attain Buddhahood. This is the first phase.

The second and the third phases are "Choosing parents" and "Being born." When a Buddha comes to this world, he is born into a royal family. This good fortune comes naturally to him due to his great merits and virtue. In addition, in this position he can best show the world that such dignity and wealth are not the most important pursuits in one's life.

"Leaving home and giving up the throne" is the fourth phase to show that true happiness comes from being able to let go of worldly possessions and prestige.

Manifestation of a Buddha requires him to take the ascetic path in his cultivation. This is to be acceptable to this world.

Only through the strength developed from concentration and wisdom, can one overcome the obstacles presented by one's internal afflictions and external temptations. This is the fifth phase, "Subduing Mara's evil obstacle."

Severing one's wandering thoughts and attachments will enable one to attain the wonderful reality of truth. This representation is within the sixth phase "Attaining Enlightenment."

All beings have been trapped in reincarnation for countless aeons. Although they have encountered Buddhism before, somehow it has only helped them to plant or reinforce their good roots. With the Pure Land teaching, if a person can truly grasp this opportunity and practice sincerely, one will finally take the last glimpse at reincarnation.

The seventh phase is "Turning the Dharma wheel." Once the Buddha achieved perfect enlightenment, the heavenly beings, recognizing him for what he was, requested him to give the teachings to this world.

Lecturing on Buddhism is turning the Dharma wheel. Turning the wheel symbolizes making this education available to beings in all directions. The center of the wheel is stationary while its circumference moves, representing stillness and movement in one. The center is hollow while its circumference is solid representing emptiness and existence. The wheel represents Buddhism as the most complete and perfect education.

The Buddha's teaching helps all beings subdue their evil obstacles, thus uncovering their true mind.

The eighth stage is "Entering the state of Nirvana." The person with good understanding knows that the Buddha actually is never apart from us at any time. However, those with less understanding believe that the Buddha left this world.

A Sangha is a group of four or more people who practice the Buddha's teachings together in accordance with the Six Principles of Harmony.

] The Six Principles of Harmony are:

1. To share the same viewpoints or goals.
2. To observe the same precepts.
3. To live and practice together harmoniously.
4. To not quarrel.
5. To experience the inner peace and happiness from practicing together harmoniously.
6. To share benefits equally.

The purpose of the Sangha is to spread the Buddha's teachings in helping all beings. Whether those committed to propagating the teachings or those devoted to supporting them, all are equally important in achieving this purpose. When one looks at a clock, one only sees the minute and hour hands and not the intricate parts within that keep it ticking. However, if one part is missing, the hands cannot move. Only in working together as one entity does the Sangha accumulate infinite merits.

Buddha Shakyamuni teaches unceasingly, even during moments of silence. Through simply observing certain movements of the Buddha, beings with high levels of intelligence and wisdom can reach realization. His teachings not only include speech, but also languages of the body and mind.

Not only do beings from the six realms come to learn from the Buddha, but beings from all the nine realms do as well.

Delusion, our biggest obstacle, arises from afflictions and wandering thoughts; therefore, the Buddha teaches us first to sever our afflictions and cease wandering thoughts.

The Buddhas and Bodhisattvas help sentient beings see through delusion to completely understand the truth of life and the universe.

The goal of our cultivation is to replace the worries surrounding us with purity of mind. The Pure Land is our destination.

The Three Learning's are self-discipline, concentration and wisdom. They are important steps in one's practice.

Even in the present age, advanced medical science remains unable to surpass the perfect and thorough teachings of the Buddha to harmonize body and mind, which contributes to a healthy body. People who truly know how to attune their body and mind to peace and purity are immune from illnesses.

Continued practice of the Three Learning's will release worries, abolish longings and eradicate delusions and attachments. Only thus can we truly understand the Buddha's teachings.

The Pure Land School uses the sutra recitation method to help people sever their afflictions. The goal of this practice is to purify both body and mind, resulting in rebirth into the Western Pure Land.

When wandering thoughts cease to arise during sutra recitation, one's body, mind and speech commit no evil. One is cultivating self-discipline when one does not commit any evil deeds and practices only good ones.

One is cultivating concentration when achieving single-minded recitation of the sutra without giving rise to the analytical mind.

One is cultivating wisdom when reciting the sutra clearly and without error.

Losing one's purity of mind to analyze its meanings during sutra recitation would be the same as reading ordinary books, thus forsaking the purpose of the Three Learning's.

The length of a sutra such as The Infinite Life Sutra is perfect for recitation; they provide us with ample time to cultivate self-discipline, concentration and wisdom.

Ridding oneself of the three inner poisons of greed, anger and ignorance within the mind enables one to obtain a healthy mind and body. Having a healthy mind is important in helping one practice Buddhism, for without a healthy mind, one will find difficulty in accepting the true teaching.

Conditioning one's mind is an essential step towards learning the Mahayana sutras. A good teacher would have the students concentrate on their cultivation of virtue before learning the sutras. Just as a dirty bowl would

need to be cleansed before it can be of good use or whatever it holds will be contaminated.

Reciting the sutras three hours or more daily for three years will deepen one's concentration. When one's concentration reaches a certain level, true wisdom can be revealed.

What is merit and virtue? It is the pure mind derived from practice of the Three Learning's of precepts, concentration and wisdom that are obtained from years of cultivation.

A pure mind is one without discriminations or attachments.

Anger is like a fire, being one of the three poisons of the mind. Once a person's anger flares up, all the merit and virtues accumulated from years of diligent cultivation completely disintegrate, sending the practitioner back to square one.

One accumulates merit and virtue when one is able to end greed in addition to diligently cultivating giving and following the precepts. The practice of patience, diligence and concentration enables one to preserve one's merit and virtue.

A person, who likes to practice giving and abides by laws and customs while conducting oneself in a proper and dignified manner, will accumulate good fortune.

Understanding what one practices is essential to one's success. Pure Land practitioners can start with the teachings from The Infinite Life Sutra, The Amitabha Sutra and "The Chapter on Samantabhadra Bodhisattva's Vows and Cultivation."

One needs to cultivate good fortune before wisdom.

Those who are mindful of Buddha Amitabha can apply the practice of the Three Conditions in their daily lives. The Three Conditions, which are the first of the Five Guidelines, are the foundation upon which Pure Land practitioners begin their practice.

Cultivating the first of the Three Conditions enables one to harvest good fortune as great as that of heavenly beings. The First Condition includes being filial and respectful to one's parents and teachers, being compassionate and not killing any living beings and cultivating according to the Ten Good Conducts (no killing, stealing, sexual misconduct, lying, abusive language, backbiting, seductive speech, greed, anger or ignorance).

The Second Condition consists of abiding by the Three Refuges, following the precepts, laws and customs, and conducting oneself in a proper and dignified manner. By practicing the Second Condition, one's good fortune will be as great as that of Pratyekabuddhas and Arhats.

One does not accomplish anything just by going through the ceremonial ritual of taking the Three Refuges. Truly taking the Three Refuges is to return from delusion, erroneous thoughts and viewpoints, and impurity and to rely on one's enlightened self-nature, proper viewpoints and thoughts, and purity within the six senses.

Practicing the Third Condition enables one to harvest good fortune like that of Bodhisattvas. One generates the Bodhi mind, deeply believes in the Law of Cause and Effect, recites and upholds Mahayana sutras and encourages others to advance on the path to enlightenment.

The second of the Five Guidelines for practitioners is to follow the Six Principles of Harmony, which show one how to get along with others. By practicing the Three Conditions and the Six Principles of Harmony, one will harvest good fortune.

After reaching a degree of attainment, one vows to practice the Bodhisattva way, teaching and benefiting all sentient beings, and working on behalf of the Buddha to publicize and advocate this ultimate perfect method of the Pure Land School.

As one generates a true and sincere heart to learn an unsurpassable method, one will naturally meet a genuine teacher to guide the way. If one does not harbor sincerity and respect in one's learning, it is useless even to have the best teacher in the world.

"Bodhisattvas unceasingly practice in accordance with limitless cultivation." (Infinite Life Sutra) To accord with Bodhisattva's manner of living and cultivation, one applies the principles such as those within The Five Guidelines, which are the Three Conditions, Six Harmonies, Three Learning's, Six Paramitas and the Ten Great Vows of Samantabhadra Bodhisattva into his/her daily lives.

By "...maturing boundless Bodhisattva's good roots" (Infinite Life Sutra) beings will be able to become Buddhas once they have perfected their merit, which involves helping all beings, until they too become Buddhas.

"Being the mindful ones of whom all Buddhas were protective" (Infinite Life Sutra). The kindness the Buddha shows us is like that of parents for their children, the only difference being that the Buddha remains mindful of us life after life, until we ourselves become Buddha.

As we observe all the world's phenomena, birth and death seem to exist. However, this is not so. In reality, they, what we perceive as birth and death, are just the coming together and dispersion of causes and conditions. Thus, nothing is really gained or lost. If we can see through this concept of gain and loss, appearance and disappearance, we will attain comfort and happiness.

Our afflictions come from caring too much about gaining and losing. When we lack something, we search for it everyday. Once we have it, we are afraid losing it. However, gaining and losing are only false conceptions of the mind. Buddhas and Bodhisattvas fully comprehend this truth. Thus, although they have already helped innumerable beings, their minds do not attach to the notion of having helped. They have neither attachment nor the thought to accumulate merits. The minds and hearts of Buddhas and Bodhisattvas are always pure and at peace.

Those who simply go through daily rituals of prostrating and offering incense and fruit may not achieve as much benefit as those who practice in accordance with the Buddha's teachings may.

All the beings in the infinite universe and beyond, including us, are interrelated. In past lives we may have been born in other worlds and been related to the beings there. When we become a Buddha or Bodhisattva, we will be able to travel to any Buddha land that we have affinities with to help those beings walk the path of awakening. "These Bodhisattvas could appear in all the Buddha lands" (Infinite Life Sutra).

Everything we see in this world is not real in the sense that it has a separate self, but is actually an accumulation of causes and conditions. Although we may think it is real, in the Buddha's mind, there is neither existence nor emptiness, appearing nor disappearing, gaining nor losing. This misconception of reality results in our delusion. Afflictions come from the inside and not the outside. They arise from our own deviated thoughts and viewpoints.

The Buddha's education helps us to break through this delusion and refrain from wrong actions, thereby avoiding adverse consequences.

Buddhas appear in this world to educate people so that we may attain enlightenment. However, they are not attached to the idea that they themselves are Buddhas or teachers. In addition, they are not attached to their ability to teach or to the idea that others are students accepting their teachings. Harboring these ideas would be attaching and discriminating and would block one from obtaining a pure mind.

The Buddha does not take credit for any achievements, nor does he linger on thoughts regarding his activities. Therefore, he does not become weary or overwrought like ordinary people.

"Like a flash of lightning, Bodhisattvas can transform into different forms" (Infinite Life Sutra). Not being attached to any forms, Bodhisattvas are able to manifest all forms.

There are four similes within "a flash of lightning." First, its speed; life is short, most people do not realize how short until stricken with illness in their old age. Second, its application; a brief flare of lightning exposing the darkness which represents our ignorance. Buddhas appear in this world to help us break through this ignorance. Third, non-attachment; there is none for any Dharma, ability, phenomena or achievements. Fourth, it is non-discriminating; lightning appears anywhere, having no discrimination over what it illuminates.

Demons and ghosts of the world are not as terrifying as demons of the mind. These demons torment our minds and bodies causing us to suffer and age quickly. They are simply brought about by our false viewpoints: the worries, miseries and our attachments to things that go against our wishes create the demons that we inflict upon ourselves.

Cultivators would do well to refrain from deviated emotions and conditions such as the absence of embarrassment and shamefulness, and the presence of jealousy, stinginess, misdeeds, drowsiness, sleep, agitation, greed, anger and ignorance.

Some people are unconsciously jealous of others who they feel are superior to them. These thoughts lead them to commit wrongdoings that result in ill consequences. Not only will they be afflicted by arrogance and jealousy life after life; these negative characteristics will block their own path to enlightenment.

Lacking a conscience and the ability to feel shame, one would commit any wrong. Moreover, one will suffer the consequences of their actions.

Stinginess arises from greed when one will not give to help others.

Misdeeds include all behaviors that are not virtuous and logical, thus blocking our virtuous nature.

Sleeping too much clouds our minds and obstructs our practice of the way.

An agitated mind is one that harbors too many wandering thoughts and is bound by worries and unrest.

Drowsiness is feeling tired and spiritless, impeding one's diligence.

The above eight afflictions, along with greed, anger and ignorance can hopelessly ensnare one in the cycle of birth and death.

Chanting the Buddha's name can diminish and eliminate one's accumulated karmic transgressions from the above eight afflictions. By replacing wandering thoughts with mindfulness of the Buddha, one can eliminate countless eons of transgressions.

The essential practice in Buddha name chanting is not quantity but quality, using every chant to replace wandering thoughts, thus eventually reaching purity of mind.

It may be more suitable for beginners to concentrate more on sutra recitation rather than Buddha name chanting, as one will have awareness of dispersion of wandering thoughts when one recites incorrectly. Buddha name chanting is easy to do, but it is not sufficient to help beginners suppress their wandering minds. However, once a person attains deeper awareness and concentration, Buddha name chanting becomes more suitable. One chooses the method that will be most effective in countering wandering thoughts and attachments.

One day the great master Yuan Ying was meditating in his room, his mind was very calm and pure. Suddenly he thought of something and immediately went to take care of it. Getting off his bed, he headed straight out of the room. Only after he was outside, did he realize the door was still closed and locked. How did he get out? In that instant, he had forgotten that there was a door, and having no attachment, had simply gone through it. However, when the thought of the door arose, he was no longer able to go through it.

Not knowing the empty nature of all appearances and phenomenon, we delude ourselves by not realizing their falseness. For example, if we perceive a wall as real, then we will not be able to go through it. However, perceiving one's body and the wall as not real allows one to pass through it.

Having an affinity, a natural bond, with this world, the Buddha will stay. Once this affinity ends, the Buddha will enter Nirvana.

The Buddha teaches us that we need to search our true self from within, not from the outside. To search from the outside would be superstitious and futile. The need is for one to end one's afflictions, greed, anger, ignorance and arrogance that block our true self from coming through.

The great Zen master, the Sixth Patriarch Hui-Neng said in The Platform Sutra, "...not being attached to any outside phenomenon is meditation, no thoughts arising from within is concentration."

Meditating is settling the mind, not just the practice of sitting in the lotus position on a cushion or platform while having wandering thoughts, one after another.

Meditation is when one is not tempted by the exterior factors of reputation, power, prestige, wealth, the five desires (wealth, lust, food/drink, fame and sleep) and impurities in the six senses (sight, sound, smell, taste, touch and idea). Concentration is when no afflictions arise from within.

One who regards others as Buddhas, is a Buddha, while an ordinary person would regard the Buddha as ordinary. In other words, a bad person would regard all as bad, whereas, a virtuous person would regard all as kind and virtuous. In reality, there is no good or bad, beautiful or ugly in the world but just reflections from our mind. The outside environment changes according to one's state of mind.

When one sees other persons as displeasing, disgusting, etc., this perception comes from the afflictions arising from within one's own mind and has nothing to do with exterior factors. "True practitioners do not see the faults in others" (Platform Sutra).

When one's self-nature arises from within, it also naturally brings out one's infinite wisdom and virtuous capabilities. This is true goodness.

For most people the usual driving force behind their hard work is reputation and wealth. For enlightened beings, the driving force in the Buddha's teaching is compassion and wisdom. With wisdom, one sees very clearly the true reality of life and the universe, regarding others as oneself. With compassion, one understands that spreading the Buddha's teaching is one's duty and responsibility. One does so, expecting nothing in return.

There are two kinds of understanding. One understands the truth of our existence and the universe; the other is reaching deeper realization from cultivation. The first one is understood through the Buddha's and Bodhisattva's education; the latter by relying on our own diligent practice.

There are many methods within Buddha Shakyamuni's teachings; the Pure Land School is one method that does not need to overcome so many levels of accomplishment before becoming a Buddha. Reciting Buddha Amitabha's name with unwavering belief, vowing to reach the Pure Land and practicing diligently will enable one to be born into the Western Pure Land.

"Numberless and limitless Bodhisattvas like these came and gathered together. There were also five hundred nuns, seven thousand laymen, five hundred laywomen and Brahma Gods from the realms of Sensuality and Form who attended the assembly" (Infinite Life Sutra).

Not only these twenty thousand attended this teaching but additional other uncountable beings from higher realms attended as well. This signifies the great importance of this teaching.

Chapter Three:

The Original Cause of the Great Teaching

"Witnessing Buddha Shakyamuni radiating light and showing wonderful signs, Venerable Ānanda gave rise to a rare heart and requested an explanation..." (Infinite Life Sutra). In response, the Most Honored One spoke of this convenient, ultimate, straightforward and yet rare treasure of truth.

Convenient means the sutra is both easy to understand and to practice.

Mahayana sutras, such as The Lotus Flower Sutra and The Flower Adornment Sutra, explain the way of becoming enlightened. Nevertheless, both of them are difficult to comprehend and even more so to practice.

The Infinite Life Sutra provides a convenient method while it aims for the highest goal - to become a Buddha.

"At that time, the Buddha radiated a glorious and awe-inspiring light ...like that of melting gold. As in a finely polished mirror, the reflection shone through the Buddha's translucent body" (Infinite Life Sutra). All these signs indicated the enlightened nature of his body and mind, like that of a perfectly clear crystal.

"He reflected great radiance and manifested myriad changes" (Infinite Life Sutra). All these were causes for giving this teaching of the sutra.

Why is the Buddha so supremely radiant? Because he is incomparably joyful. This is the happiest day for Buddha Shakyamuni. At last, the opportunity has arisen to give this ultimate and convenient teaching.

While Buddha Shakyamuni was contemplating on Buddha Amitabha, all other Buddhas in the ten directions were contemplating on Buddha Amitabha and propagating this sutra as well. Uniting with others, this brilliant power of concentration was focused through Buddha Shakyamuni, thus making him appear extraordinarily magnificent.

Our face is a reflection of our state of mind. If one harbors a kind heart, it is reflected in a compassionate appearance. If one has a corrupted mind, it is reflected in a cruel face.

The Buddha's appearance is a perfect one. As we are mindful of the Buddha, we will gradually acquire the body and mind of a Buddha; this in turn will be reflected in our bearing.

In all the years Venerable Ānanda had been with Buddha Shakyamuni, he had never seen him so magnificent as he was at that time. On the behalf of all sentient beings, Venerable Ānanda requested this teaching.

"Venerable Ānanda rose from his seat, bared his right shoulder, knelt on one knee and placed his palms together in veneration and addressed the Buddha" (Infinite Life Sutra).

When requesting instructions from our teacher, it is appropriate to rise from our seat.

In India, when people wished to show the utmost respect for someone, they would bare their right shoulder and kneel on their right knee. Kneeling on the right knee enables one to rise at anytime to serve the teacher.

When palms are placed together as one, they represent concentration and respect. Separated fingers indicate a scattered mind.

With concentration, one is ready to accept the Buddha's instructions.

Venerable Ānanda asked, "World Honored One, today you have entered the great Samādhi...could you explain to me its significance?" (Infinite Life Sutra).

The Buddha was in the Contemplating Buddha Amitabha Samādhi, a perfect Samādhi.

On this day, Buddha Shakyamuni was practicing a very special method. He was about to speak of a way that equally helps all beings to become enlightened.

In The Diamond Sutra, Venerable Shariputra had raised two questions. First, where should our minds dwell? Second, how do we overcome our wandering minds? The answer is simple. In the Pure Land School, dwelling in mindfulness of Buddha Amitabha overcomes our wandering thoughts.

All the Buddhas contemplate Buddha Amitabha and the magnificence of the Western Pure Land. This is the way they guide all beings together on the path to enlightenment.

The greatest teacher is one who, without discrimination or bias, teaches all the ways to attain Buddhahood.

Contemplating Buddha Amitabha is contemplating his forty-eight vows, in which every vow is to equally help all sentient beings to become enlightened.

All the Buddhas of the past, present and future are mindful of Amitabha. Likewise, Buddha Amitabha is mindful of them.

The Venerable Ānanda pondered: Today, Buddha Shakyamuni is displaying a magnificent aura. He must be contemplating the Buddhas in other worlds; otherwise, his countenance would not be so extraordinary. Therefore, he asked the Buddha.

Buddha Shakyamuni replied to Ānanda: "Excellent! Excellent!" (Infinite Life Sutra). The first "Excellent" means the time has come for this teaching to be given so that all beings may become Buddhas within one lifetime. The second "Excellent" means the fulfillment of the Buddha's wish that every being may become a Buddha quickly, not just to become an Arhat or a Bodhisattva.

Human life is as short as a flash of lightning, appearing and vanishing in milli-seconds. Moreover, there is nothing in this world we can truly grasp, since in reality everything is an illusion.

It was said that when one offers a Pratyekabuddha a bowl of rice, one would not suffer poverty for many aeons. As an example, Venerable Mahakashyapa had made offerings to a Pratyekabuddha; consequently, he would not be poor for nine billion aeons.

By requesting the true teachings, the merit Ānanda obtained was one billion times more than that of making offerings to countless numbers of Arhats or Pratyekabuddhas living in one galaxy.

Today, if we recite and study the Infinite Life Sutra then introduce it to others, we will gain the same merits, as did Venerable Ānanda.

Those who believe and vow to go to the Western Pure Land, and are mindful of Buddha Amitabha shall be born there without regression and eventually become Buddhas. This is true liberation.

To rise from hell to the hungry ghost realm, to the animal realm and even up to the heaven realm is only liberation to a certain extent. If we do not break out of the cycle of birth and death, no matter how much we transcend, we will not be truly liberated.

The kindness the Buddha has shown us is far beyond that of our parents. The compassion that our parents have offered us lasts for only one lifetime, whereas, the Buddha's compassion continues unceasingly life after life.

One goal of the Buddha's appearance in this world is to bring us the true and beneficial teaching. For example, the teaching given in the Infinite Life Sutra shows us the way to single-mindedly contemplate Buddha Amitabha and to reach the Pure Land.

It is an extremely rare opportunity to be born as a human. If one carefully examines his/her thoughts each day, how many of these arise from greed, anger or ignorance? Greed can be as simple as wishing for something more than the essentials. Anger can be felt in irritation or jealousy. Ignorance arises simply by lacking knowledge of proper thoughts and behavior. Greed leads one to the hungry ghost realm, anger to the hells, and ignorance to the animal realms. The thoughts that preoccupy us the most, especially the ones during our last moments will determine the realm of our next life.

Of the six billion people in this world, how many have actually encountered Buddhism? Among these, how many have learned about Mahayana Buddhism? Of these, how many know of the Pure Land School? Among Pure Land Buddhists, how many have practiced single-mindedly? Through this process of elimination, we find that very few will attain Buddhahood in one lifetime.

Today we freely distribute thousands of copies of the Infinite Life Sutra to the public. It would be worthwhile even if only one or two people truly believed, cultivated and were able to reach the Western Pure Land.

To be able to renounce this Saha world and single-mindedly vow to reach the Western Pure Land is the result of one's good fortune and accumulated merit.

What are good roots? One possesses good roots when one truly believes and understands the Buddha's teaching.

One who believes in the Infinite Life Sutra and is willing to practice accordingly, with a joyful heart, has already made offerings to countless Buddhas. This person should feel extremely fortunate, since his/her good roots brought this about.

Why are we still deluded, confused and receiving retributions? Because we have neither deep concentration nor wisdom.

In order to attain concentration, one only need be concerned whether one is abiding by the precepts and not whether others are. When concerned with other people's practices, one's own concentration will not be achieved. This preoccupation deters purity of mind. When one regards all others as having the purest of minds, that person's mind will reflect this purity and achieve concentration.

The Buddha's concentration and wisdom are perfect.

The liberation of an Arhat cannot compare with that of a Pratyekabuddha, which cannot compare with that of a Bodhisattva. A Bodhisattva's cannot compare with that of a Buddha. A Buddha's liberation is the ultimate liberation.

The Buddha's perfect concentration and wisdom give rise to ten kinds of freedom.

First, freedom from limited life span; one will never grow old as one controls longevity, when one's willpower surpasses karma's control.

Second, freedom from the deluded mind; the mind has no wandering thoughts, worries or attachments.

Everyone's good fortune is different. There is really no way one can change other's lives simply with worries, as everyone's life experiences are governed by the Law of Cause and Effect. Once this is understood, one would truly understand that feeling worried about others is just a form of deluded thoughts and is therefore pointless.

Third, freedom from material needs; one would never lack the essentials.

The more one possesses, the more one worries; such as which to use, how to safeguard or how to acquire new ones. Having freedom from material needs means using the basic essential without the worries, even if one could have as much as one desired.

Fourth, freedom of activities; for example, the Buddha is free to appear in any suitable form to help beings in the nine realms.

Fifth, freedom of birth; one can choose which family to be born into.

Sixth, freedom from ignorance; one intuitively possesses all knowledge without obstacles.

When one possesses knowledge, one needs to be clear as to whether the people of that particular time are able to wisely use that knowledge. If not, then it is best to withhold that knowledge, thus preventing any catastrophes from happening.

Seventh, freedom of vow fulfillment; everything that one wishes or vows to do will come to fruition.

Eighth, freedom of spiritual penetration; possessing extraordinary abilities in the six senses of sight, hearing, smell, taste or speech, thought and action.

Ninth, freedom of Dharma; the Buddha's teaching is excellent in that all the beings can comprehend his direct teachings without any misunderstanding.

Tenth, freedom of wisdom; the Buddha knows all the lives of all beings in the ten directions, in the past, present and future and how to accommodate his teachings to each individual being.

When one's mind is at its purest, one can achieve these ten freedoms. All beings inherently possess the potential of achieving the qualities of a Buddha.

Chapter Four:

The Causal Ground of Monk Dharmakara

"In past, inconceivable countless aeons ago, there was a Buddha who appeared in the world named Lokeshvararaja." (Infinite Life Sutra)

Buddha Lokeshvararaja appeared in this world when people were very conservative and extremely law-abiding, following the letter of the law and not the spirit. The name Lokeshvararaja means to be comfortable and at ease while still following the rules, which is what this Buddha was trying to convey.

Every Buddha, including Buddha Lokeshvararaja, has the same ten titles to represent their infinite wisdom, virtue and abilities.

First, "Thus Come One" is one who truly and thoroughly comprehends that the intrinsic nature and the extrinsic form are one inseparable entity.

Second, "Worthy of Offerings" indicates that the Buddha deserves the offerings from all beings for his perfection in knowledge and cultivation of virtue. Sowing in the field of merit, by making offerings to the Buddha, enables one to harvest good fortune in the future.

One important reason why Buddhists make offerings to Buddha Shakyamuni is to repay our gratitude for his being our original teacher; the offerings remind us to respect our teachers and their teachings, but not to blindly worship them. Another important reason is to acknowledge and emulate the virtuous; vowing to become a Buddha also.

Third, "Perfect Enlightenment" is the abbreviated form of Supreme Unbiased Perfect Enlightenment.

Fourth, "Perfection in Wisdom and Cultivation" means one's understanding and practice reach full completion.

Fifth, "Skillful in Non-attachment." All Buddhas are neither bound by birth and death or by the state of Nirvana.

Sixth, "Knower of the Worlds" comprehends everything in the universe.

Seventh, "The Unsurpassed Scholar."

Eighth, "Great Hero" is what the Buddha is by guiding all beings in their individual practices and solving their problems through his teachings, achieving what others cannot.

Ninth, "Teacher of Heavenly Beings and Humankind."

"Buddha, the World Honored One" is the person who has already attained perfect complete realization and the above nine virtues, thus deserving the respect of the world, though he is not attached to his achievements, and views himself as equal to all beings. This concludes the ten titles for all Buddhas.

Buddha Lokeshvararaja taught for forty-two aeons. This indicates that the life span of a human being at that time was even longer.

"At that time, a great king by the name of World Abundant heard the Buddha's teaching" (Infinite Life Sutra).

After King World Abundant received the teaching from Buddha Lokeshvararaja, he decided to give up his kingship to become a monk. He was renamed Dharmakara, meaning "Dharma Treasure."

Giving up the kingship is an example of abdicating worldly attachments to pursue self-realization, while dedicating oneself to educate others in the Buddha's teaching; thus, one serves all the sentient beings not just in this world, but in the infinite universe and beyond.

To create good fortunes for all, one contributes one's wisdom and capabilities. Ordinary people only think of themselves, their family or perhaps even their country, whereas, a realized person strives to help all sentient beings break through delusion to find true liberation.

Dharmakara started practicing the Bodhisattva's way, which helped him to attain an awakened mind.

A Bodhisattva can be any person in any place. They are no different from us except that they do not harbor any discrimination and attachments, and are unaffected by worries and troubles in their daily lives and work. For example,

spiritual or religious leaders can be Bodhisattvas, guiding beings from delusion, improper thoughts and viewpoints, and polluted thinking.

Dharmakara was an extraordinarily talented person, who in many ways already surpassed most people. In his past lives Dharmakara must have practiced extensively the giving of wealth, fearlessness and teaching in order to be born into a royal family and to have wealth, longevity, intelligence and wisdom respectively.

By practicing diligently the Buddha's teaching, Dharmakara reached the utmost achievement.

As the power of mindfulness and wisdom enhanced Dharmakara's determination to achieve in his practice without regression, he began to formulate his great vows. No one could surpass him.

"He went to visit the Buddha, showed his respect by prostrating..." (Infinite Life Sutra).

Prostration is one form of practice. When prostrating, one should do so with a sincere and pure mind, without wandering thoughts. Thus, one cultivates concentration in addition to obtaining a healthy body.

"He placed his palms together in reverence towards the Buddha and praised him with these verses and made the great vows" (Infinite Life Sutra).

"The Thus Come One has a subtle, wonderful and majestic appearance, which no one in the universe can equal" (Infinite Life Sutra). This is one of the reasons why people like to get close to them.

"The Buddha's light shines without limit throughout the ten directions, covering even the brightness from the sun and moon" (Infinite Life Sutra). This verse praises the Buddha's light and wisdom representing purity, equality, wisdom and compassion.

"The World Honored One can present with a sound and make all kinds of beings understand in their own languages" (Infinite Life Sutra). When the Buddha gives a teaching, people from different regions in the world understand it. Moreover, all heavenly beings, Bodhisattvas and Arhats from other worlds and realms who attend, will also comprehend.

"The Buddha can manifest in a subtle and wonderful appearance, and let all beings see him as their own kind" (Infinite Life Sutra). The appearances of the Buddhas or Bodhisattvas are images projected from the minds of different beings.

The above verses praise the Buddha's virtuous capabilities.

"I (Dharmakara) wish to attain the Buddha's pure and clear sound, and let the Dharma voice universally reach limitless boundaries" (Infinite Life Sutra).

"I wish to penetrate the profound, subtle and wonderful Buddha's teaching" (Infinite Life Sutra).

"May my wisdom be as vast and deep as the sea and my mind pure and void of impurities and afflictions" (Infinite Life Sutra).

Although one may not be verbally chanting the Buddha's name at all times, it is important to be mindful of the Buddha unceasingly or else wandering thoughts may arise. Wandering thoughts are what pull us back into the endless cycle of reincarnation. In other words, if a Pure Land practitioner is not truly practicing for the Pure Land, he/she is practicing for the six realms of reincarnation.

Pure mind and true wisdom prevent one from falling into the three bad realms; moreover, they lift one up to reach the perfection of the mind.

"The poisons of greed, anger and ignorance will forever disappear, with the strength of samádhi I will end all delusions and faults" (Infinite Life Sutra).

Three good roots for ordinary people to develop are ridding themselves of the Three Poisons: greed, anger and ignorance. Bodhisattvas have already eradicated these three. What they concentrate on is cultivating diligence.

Strength developed from Contemplation of Buddha Amitabha Samádhi may dissolve all past transgressions, and uncover our wisdom by ending greed, anger, ignorance and delusion. This enables our inner brightness to shine through. We achieve this by sincere mindfulness of Buddha Amitabha and cultivate without doubt, intermingling with other thoughts and methods and without cessation.

In the Shurangama Sutra, Great Strength Bodhisattva taught us to use the Buddha name chanting method, to constantly maintain a pure mind void of thoughts. This will eventually uncover our true mind, leading us to the state of Samádhi.

"Like the past incalculable Buddhas, may I become a great teacher to all living beings in the nine realms" (Infinite Life Sutra). Dharmakara wished that one day he would be a teacher to the beings in the whole universe like other countless Buddhas in the past, present and future.

"And liberate everyone in every world from the myriad miseries of birth, old age, sickness and death" (Infinite Life Sutra). A great teacher helps to liberate all beings in the six realms from the suffering of birth, aging, sickness and death. He also helps those enlightened beings who have transcended

reincarnation, but have not yet become a Buddha, to transcend their remaining ignorance.

"I will constantly practice the Six Paramitas of giving, precept observation, patience, diligence, concentration and wisdom" (Infinite Life Sutra). Bodhisattvas themselves not only practice the Six Paramitas (Principles) but also encourage others to practice as well.

The first of the Six Principles is Giving. There are three kinds of Giving.

1. Giving of wealth, which will result in wealth in return.
2. Giving of knowledge, either worldly or spiritual, which will result in intelligence or insight.
3. Giving of fearlessness, which will result in longevity and good health.

All the infinite afflictions can be summed into six basic afflictions: greed, anger, ignorance, arrogance, doubt and erroneous viewpoints. These six can all be categorized under "greed." Anger arises when one cannot satisfy the greed within. Once the greed is satisfied, the anger naturally subsides. The practice of giving neutralizes greed, the worst of the three poisons of the mind.

To rid ourselves of greed, we first reflect deeply to see what we crave the most. Starting from there, we proceed to let go of reputation, wealth, the five desires and the temptations of the six dusts or pollutants of the six senses.

One creates obstacles for oneself by being unable to give. Reading Liao Fan's Four Lessons is a good basis for developing the Paramita of Giving. Understanding the truth of Cause and Effect, one will have the courage and joy to let go.

When letting go of what one is destined to have, one will simply find it coming back from somewhere else. One will not be able to discard what one was meant to have, nor will one be able to keep what one was not meant to have. Furthermore, using devious means will not retain it either, but will instead bring disaster.

The life of a human being is mapped out at birth. Bodhisattvas, heavenly beings or Kings of the Underworld do not control fate. Fate is determined by the causes one planted in their previous lives as well as in this life. Thus, one will either experience suffering or happiness in this life. However, one's thoughts, speech or behavior, resulting in good or bad karma, can change fate.

Giving is not discarding, but gaining. It is actually a way of earning interest, but even more secure than that of a bank. Banks can go bankrupt. The value of a dollar may fall. However, the value within the acts of true giving will not diminish.

The second Principle is precept observation. Its extended meaning is to follow the laws and customs wherever or whenever they apply.

It is essential to practice giving before precept observation because without giving to neutralize the greed, one is unable to observe the precepts (laws, etc). For instance, when greed is in control, one thinks only of ways to possess wealth, not how to observe laws, an example is tax evasion.

Cultivating the ten good conducts always brings good results. Although the result is good, this will only help one to reach heaven. However, one is still mired in reincarnation. On the other hand, observing the precepts brings the profound benefits of transcending reincarnation.

The third Principle is patience. It teaches us to be patient in everything we say and do.

It takes great patience to transcend the cycle of life and death. For all its simplicity and ease, the Buddha Name Chanting Method calls for patience in maintaining continuity, without doubt or intermingling. Though it may be hard at first, the result is attaining a certain degree of purity of mind, which brings out the true self, joy and true happiness; giving one the utmost enjoyment in life.

With patience, Buddha Name Chanting elevates one's state of mind, level by level, enabling one to experience utmost happiness. The practice of giving is the first level, precept observation the second and patience the third. Like constructing a building while disregarding the first level, not being able to give will hinder one from reaching the second or the third levels.

The fourth Principle is diligence. Diligence is being skillful and focusing on only one specialty, which brings a meaningful outcome. To succeed, one needs to concentrate on one method. People who attained achievements in this world initially specialized in one method. For those who study a variety of fields simultaneously, it is very hard to rise above the ones who have specialized.

Upon reaching a certain level through profound cultivation on one method, we end affliction to open our mind. The more we focus on one simple method, the faster we advance. The more we intermingle with numerous difficult methods, the slower we advance.

Because all sutras originate from self-nature, when one thoroughly comprehends one sutra, one comprehends all sutras.

The fifth Principle is deep concentration. Insight gained from the practice of deep concentration helps us to truly suppress afflictions.

The sixth Principle is wisdom. With firm concentration, we can awaken our realization, turning affliction into enlightenment and thus, truly severing our afflictions. At this point, one thoroughly comprehends the true reality of life and the universe, understanding clearly cause and effect, thereby attaining the great liberation.

"For those undelivered sentient beings, let them be crossed over (to the other shore)" (Infinite Life Sutra). For those sentient beings who have not had the chance to encounter the Buddha's teaching, let the seed be planted so that in the future they will encounter these teachings.

"For those already delivered let them attain Buddhahood" (Infinite Life Sutra). For those with good roots able to accept the Buddha's teaching, the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas will help them to progress rapidly to Buddhahood.

The Infinite Life Sutra is the passport that the Buddha gave us to go to the Western Pure Land. Although we possess it, it may not be ours to use. Only when we are familiar with and practice its teachings, does it become ours to use.

When lacking good roots, good fortune, merit, causes and conditions from the past, all one has to do is to nurture more in the present. Studying, reciting and comprehending the sutras, will help to break through doubt and instill unwavering belief in the Pure Land.

"I would rather firmly and gallantly seek the proper enlightenment, than make offerings as boundless as Ganges sands, to the sages" (Infinite Life Sutra).

The Ganges is the largest river in India with sand as fine as flour. It is often used in the sutras to describe an uncountable number.

Making offerings to innumerable Buddhas and Bodhisattvas brings incredible good fortune. Yet, this fortune can only be enjoyed in the three good realms of reincarnation. Rather than staying in reincarnation, a Pure Land practitioner should put all their efforts into attaining rebirth in the Western Pure Land.

The following eight verses are Monk Dharmakara's great vow to become a Buddha.

"I wish to firmly remain in Samádhi, and constantly emit light to shine on all" (Infinite Life Sutra). Monk Dharmakara would stay in the Samádhi of Buddha Contemplation. The bright light generated from him would shine on all beings in the ten directions.

"I vow to attain a vast and pure land..." (Infinite Life Sutra). The Western Pure Land was created from Monk Dharmakara's great pure vows. Beings are born in that land as the result of their pure karma.

"...and make it's supreme adornment peerless" (Infinite Life Sutra). The splendor of the Western Pure Land is unequaled by any other Buddha land.

Monk Dharmakara did not establish the Pure Land for himself, but to provide an ideal environment for all beings to come and practice, to eventually become a Buddha.

"For those beings amidst the six realms, I wish that they can quickly obtain rebirth in my land and enjoy the bliss" (Infinite Life Sutra). Monk Dharmakara wished to provide his utmost help to those in reincarnation. It would bring them peace and happiness if they could reach his world - the Western Pure Land.

Bliss is the result of peace. However, harmony has to be achieved before peace ensues.

In practicing, one nurtures the five virtues: gentility, kindness, respectfulness, thriftiness and humility. With others, one practices the Six Principles of Harmony.

"I aspire to constantly employ compassion to help sentient beings and to cross over countless beings in misery" (Infinite Life Sutra). The extent of Monk Dharmakara's compassion to help all beings is beyond time and space; it is endless and dimensionless.

Monk Dharmakara's compassion, which rose from the purity and equality of his mind, led him to vow to help all sentient beings cross over the river of reincarnation to the other shore of enlightenment.

"The power of my vow and determination is adamant, only the Buddha's unsurpassed wisdom can perceive them" (Infinite Life Sutra).

"Even amidst all kinds of suffering my vow will never regress" (Infinite Life Sutra). Although he would undergo all kinds of suffering, Monk Dharmakara would never waiver in his vows.

Chapter Five:

Ceaseless Cultivation with Vigorous Devotion and Utmost Sincerity

To be enlightened, one first generates the Bodhi mind.

Generating a Bodhi mind is vowing to attain Buddhahood so that one can help all sentient beings. Great Master Ou-I stated that vowing to be born into the Western Pure Land is the supreme Bodhi mind.

Either worldly or spiritual Dharma is not real but illusive. Only the Western Pure Land is real as indicated by infinite life, which is the most important of all infinities. With it, one can enjoy all that is wonderful and magnificent.

A truly awakened person will sincerely be mindful of Buddha Amitabha from night to day and day to night.

Although a person listens to Dharma talks, recites the sutra and chants

"Amitabha", without diligence and constancy, he or she is not truly awakened.

How to chant the Buddha's name? Silently or aloud? Four syllables (Amitabha) or six (Namo Amitabha)? The Pure Land method is the simplest and easiest without fixed forms. It is up to the practitioner to decide what is most suitable for him or her.

Chanting the Buddha's name aloud helps to suppress afflictions. When we chant aloud, we can chase away wandering thoughts and drowsiness thus concentrating our mind. When we are alert, we can chant silently but continuously. We need to know which is most fitting.

There is no fixed form in chanting the Buddha's name, but there is a basic principle, to let our mind become quiet, peaceful and without wandering thoughts. This is one of the purposes in chanting the Buddha's name.

We can do walking meditation while chanting. When we feel tired, we can sit and continue chanting. If we feel stiff when sitting, we may get up to walk or prostrate. In this way, we can adjust our body accordingly.

The more we chant and are mindful of Buddha Amitabha, the less our wandering thoughts will arise and the purer our mind will become, and the more wisdom we will attain. If not so, then something is incorrect in our way of practice. Therefore, we need to know how to harmonize our body and mind to keep our mind peaceful and quiet, and our body active and healthy.

The title Infinite Life Sutra clearly explains that one chants the Buddha's name with a pure, non-discriminating and awakened mind. On the other hand, one uses the chanting method to attain a pure, non-discriminating and awakened mind. The chanting enhances this state of mind, which in turn enhances further the chanting.

"After Monk Dharmakara spoke these verses, he addressed to the Buddha and said, 'I wish to practice the Bodhisattva way'" (Infinite Life Sutra). The Bodhisattva way is to help all sentient beings.

Monk Dharmakara vowed to attain the perfect complete enlightenment, to become a Buddha, to help sentient beings and not for himself.

Four Universal Vows of Buddhas and Bodhisattvas are:

1. Sentient beings are innumerable, I vow to help them all.
2. Afflictions are inexhaustible, I vow to end them all.
3. Ways to practice are boundless, I vow to master them all.
4. Enlightenment is unsurpassable, I vow to attain it.

Today, we wholeheartedly vow to be born into the Pure Land to become a Buddha like Buddha Amitabha so we can help all sentient beings. To do this, we start with the first vow, then proceed to the second vow, etc. Before attaining unsurpassable Enlightenment, one needs to master the ways of practice. Before one masters the ways of practice, one needs to end afflictions. And before beginning to end afflictions, one needs to vow to help all sentient beings.

Will the one who truly generates such a great, ultimate vow to become completely enlightened create any bad karma or evil thoughts? Absolutely not. Could this person give in to temptation? Of course not. Not even when faced with the opportunity to be the president of a country or the king of the Maha-Brahman heaven. His goal to become enlightened is so pure and proper, that he would not be tempted even by such opportunities.

In order to eradicate the roots of birth and death, the first priority is to sever afflictions and then vow to go to the Western Pure Land. Once we sever our afflictions and attain Buddha Name Mindfulness Samádhi, we are certain to go to the Pure Land. We need to set this as our most important goal in this life.

"Ways to practice are boundless, I vow to master them all" (Third Universal Vow). Life is short; we need to wait until we reach the Pure Land, where we

will have the best of teachers and classmates to learn from, and the time to study and master all the sutras.

Many practitioners are in a hurry to accomplish in this lifetime, the latter two of the Four Universal Vows. They studied and practiced too many different methods, failed to obtain a pure mind and were unable to end their afflictions, thus missing this rarest opportunity to achieve attainment in this life.

Many people come to practice Buddhism only for themselves, to keep their family from harm, to have successful careers, health and longevity. They may practice for a lifetime, only to remain mired in the cycle of life and death. Their goal was only to seek the good fortune of humans and heavenly beings.

Buddha and Bodhisattvas are not celestial beings, for the latter are still mired within the cycle of the six realms. Celestial beings are deluded and do not totally understand the true reality of life and the universe.

"I entreat the Buddha to extensively proclaim to me the sutras and Buddha dharma. I will uphold and cultivate them accordingly" (Infinite Life Sutra). This illustrates Monk Dharmakara's learning approach. If one is not thoroughly awakened, one will not be so determined in cultivating and upholding the teacher's guidance.

Upon finding one's behavior, thoughts and viewpoints to be in conflict with the teachings in the sutra, one should correct them. Or else no matter how many times one recites, it would be futile because no meaningful results would be gained. When some cultivators fail to receive positive effects from recitation, instead of reflecting within they may place the blame on Buddhas and Bodhisattvas, in effect slandering them, causing themselves to be born into the hell realm.

How much the teacher will instruct depends on the learning attitude of the student. The more the student can uphold and cultivate, the more the teacher will impart.

Monk Dharmakara vowed that when he becomes a Buddha, his wisdom, light, the land where he lives (Western Pure Land) and what he teaches (Namo Amitabha) would be known by all sentient beings of infinite Buddha lands in ten directions.

All sentient beings of the six realms in the ten directions who go to the Pure Land will first become Bodhisattvas.

Monk Dharmakara also vowed to become a Buddha who surpassed all other Buddhas. He asked Buddha Lokeshvararaja if he would be able to accomplish these vows. Buddha Lokeshvararaja replied with an example. "If a person tries to scoop up the water from the ocean through many aeons, he will dry up the

water and see the bottom. With perseverance and sincerity what wish is there that he cannot fulfill?" (Infinite Life Sutra). If one is truly determined, one can achieve any goal.

What is the sincere mind? A mind without wandering thoughts. One who has such a mind shall be awakened listening to Dharma talks.

Today we feel unhappy and suffer hardships because our minds are impure, discriminating and deluded.

Great Master Chin-Liang stated in his commentary on the Avatamsaka (Flower Adornment) Sutra that one who has not yet severed one's afflictions or become awakened, will find his or her extensive knowledge leads to erroneous viewpoints. It is essential to be balanced in both cultivation and understanding.

A Dharma lecturer who does not cultivate often will have erroneous thoughts and viewpoints and will therefore mislead others. This person uses his or her own viewpoints, which distort the Buddha's teachings into worldly viewpoints.

Buddha Lokeshvararaja did not directly answer Monk Dharmakara's question as to whether or not he would be able to accomplish his vows. Rather, he asked Monk Dharmakara to contemplate which expedient way to cultivate and accomplish the adornment of the Buddha land.

Once our minds are pure, non-discriminating and awakened, the Buddha and we are of one mind for that split second. However, once our minds revert to greed, anger, ignorance and arrogance, we are again mortal. Buddhas have the ability to maintain their pure state at all times.

Monk Dharmakara's good roots, wisdom, virtue and learning surpassed all the others, enabling him to know how to accomplish his vows. Given only a hint, he would instantly comprehend all.

All the Buddhas establish their own Buddha land by their respective vows.

Some Buddhas choose to go to impure worlds, like Buddha Shakyamuni choosing to help the sentient beings in this Saha world. Other Buddhas choose a pure world. Therefore, Monk Dharmakara would make his own choice.

Buddha Amitabha had already become a Buddha infinite aeons ago, not just the ten stated in the sutra. He is very compassionate, pretending to know nothing so that Buddha Lokeshvararaja would have the opportunity to give him a detailed explanation, thus, allowing us to hear the sutra.

Monk Dharmakara responded, "Such principles are vast and profound, it is not the state of my own can perceive. I entreat the Thus Come One, with the request to be recognizable by all, to broadly proclaim and manifest to me the measureless, wonderful lands of all Buddhas. When I hear and see such Dharmas, I will contemplate, practice and determine to fulfill my vows."

The goal of ancient Chinese education was to teach the students to treat all with proper manners. Only when one has clear understanding of the relationships between father and son, siblings, friends, and co-workers, and how to cultivate one's virtue, will one know how to be an honorable person, and thus how to get along harmoniously with people. Knowing this will ensure one a happy family, a harmonious society, a strong nation and a peaceful world.

Morality and proper conduct are the first priority of Confucian education. If a student does not possess these qualities, a wise teacher will try to correct the faults before proceeding with the teaching. This is to prevent the student from gaining any ability to harm society.

Buddha Lokeshvararaja knew that Monk Dharmakara was decent and virtuous, intelligent and wise, harboring a great compassionate vow. Therefore, to comply with his wish, the Buddha described and showed to him the merits, virtues and adornment of all the twenty one billion Buddha lands. Twenty-one is a symbolic number in the Esoteric school symbolizing complete perfection.

When Zen Patriarch Master Dharma met Emperor Liang Wu in China, he found the emperor very proud of himself. The emperor said, "I have already accomplished many good deeds in the name of Buddhism. I have established four hundred and eighty Buddhist temples and helped hundreds of thousands of people to become ordained persons. How great is my merit from all of this?" Master Dharma honestly replied, "No merit at all."

If the emperor had asked instead, "how great is my good fortune from all this?" Master Dharma would have answered, "Very great indeed!"

Nowadays, many people misunderstand the difference between merit and good fortune. They think that simply donating money will gain much merit. Actually, this only brings good fortune. Merit is gained through one's practice by observing the precepts, cultivating concentration and attaining wisdom. Merit cannot be bought.

When we are ignorant of our faults and others come and tell us, we would do well to correct them as soon as possible. This is precept observation. Precept observation does not just include observing precepts in the Buddhist sutras but also following the advice of teachers, parents and friends.

Our countenance can be changed by the thoughts we harbor in our mind. If we are kind and gentle, our face will become kindhearted. If we are cruel and malicious, our face will become harsh looking. We bear the responsibility for our features after age forty, they are no longer solely what we were born with.

Fortune-tellers have a saying; "a fortunate land is dwelt by people with good fortune and vice versa." If a person with less good fortune lived in a fortunate area, this person would soon feel uncomfortable and would want to move away. Thus, it is important to cultivate good fortune.

The Buddha is the honored one complete with two perfections: one is wisdom the other is good fortune.

It is recommended that the practitioner spend at least ten years studying just one sutra to truly master it. On the other hand, if one studies ten sutras in ten years, one will barely skim their surface.

Good students are the ones who consecutively spend ten years mastering one sutra, then two to three years on the second sutra, then half a year on the third and then one to two months on the fourth. The deeper one delves into the first sutra, the more concentration one achieves, thus building a strong foundation. Once one deeply comprehends one sutra, it takes less time to learn a new one.

In the beginning of their practice, the teacher instructs the students to concentrate only on sutras of their selected school and not on those of other schools. This is to cultivate concentration in order to attain the pure mind. When the first step is achieved, one may continue to develop comprehensive learning.

The four studies of Confucian teachings are virtue, speech, skills to earn a living and finally the arts. It is important for one to learn them in their respective order.

There is an ancient Chinese saying, "The tongue is the gate leading to good fortune or misfortune throughout one's life." Beware of careless speech, which can easily hurt others, unexpectedly causing resentment in them and bringing reprisals upon us. Therefore, it is important to learn appropriate speech.

During that time, Buddha Lokeshvararaja was very patient in giving instructions for one hundred billion years and Monk Dharmakara was equally patient in learning tirelessly. It took that long to thoroughly view and analyze all the Buddha land in the ten directions. This illustrates that patience in learning is the key to success.

Taking something without permission is stealing. Of course, if one steals from others, one will have to pay them back someday. If one steals the possession of another, he or she only owes that person. If one steals city property, for

example a public telephone installed by the city, then he or she owes the citizens of that city. If the property belongs to the country, then he or she owes the citizens of that country. Property in temples belongs to sentient beings in the infinite universe. Consequently, If one steals from temples, then he or she owes infinite beings in the ten directions thus leading one to the Avici Hell (the deepest of the eight burning hells).

Buddha Amitabha's unsurpassable forty-eight vows were generated gradually during Dharmakara's hundred billion years of study and five aeons of cultivation. He condensed and perfected all that he learned from his study and cultivation of the Buddha land in the ten directions to create the ideal land without any negative elements.

When Buddha Amitabha made his selections to create his land, he used a single mind, a true mind without wandering, discriminating, attaching or deluded thoughts. With this true mind, every single choice would be perfect.

Good choices are made when one's mind is truly at peace.

A true Pure Land cultivator chants the Buddha's name with a sincere and pure mind. It is said in sutras that no bad spirits would dare to come within forty miles of a true cultivator. When one's body and mind are pure, Buddha Amitabha and all other Buddhas and Bodhisattvas will care for and protect this person.

One should be ashamed of one's lack of cultivation if the spirits often come and make fun of oneself. Most likely, it indicates that the cultivator is not practicing in accordance with the teachings.

One is not practicing in accordance with the Buddha's teachings if one chants the Buddha's name or recites the sutra while still harboring doubt, unable to let go of fame, wealth or desire. No matter how much one cultivates, all the efforts will be futile if one still attaches to greed, anger, ignorance or arrogance, discrimination between right or wrong, yours or mine and has nothing to do with the purity, equality and awakening,

In our daily lives, it is necessary to practice even tiny good deeds, for an accumulation of these will make a great deed. Likewise, one would do well to be aware of even trivial faults and correct them, for many trivial faults add up to a big one. One needs to start from small places in severing misdeeds and accumulating good ones.

True cultivation starts at the place where thoughts arise.

The principle that one needs to follow in continuing the lifeline of the Buddha's teachings is to accord with conditions and not to purposely seek out opportunities. If the opportunities do not arise, we do not seek or force an

opportunity. If we harbor an idea to create an opportunity, our mind will be neither calm nor pure, nor will it be in accordance with the teachings.

One waits for the opportunity to spontaneously arise. If it is not yet the right time, then we just diligently cultivate.

Never try to purposely seek out an opportunity, but when the opportunity arises, one needs to do one's best in accomplishing it.

Many practitioners, who were formerly ill, recovered naturally upon chanting the Buddha's name sincerely.

A professor of Tan Chiang University, Taiwan, had a tumor in his head for twenty years. Since the tumor was not very big, he did not worry about it. Recently when the tumor began to grow, the doctor suggested surgery. A practitioner suggested that he chant the name of Guan Yin Bodhisattva instead. After the professor chanted sincerely for four months, the doctor reexamined him and found the tumor was gone. When the mind is pure, the body naturally becomes pure.

In the Buddha's teachings, it is more important to have confidence in oneself than to believe in the Buddha. When one loses confidence in oneself, one's self-nature is not equal to that of a Buddha. At that point, even Buddhas and Bodhisattvas are unable to help this person. Only when one is determined and has complete confidence in oneself, will Buddhas and Bodhisattvas truly be able to help.

Many people's beliefs are easily shaken by the persuasion of ones from other schools. This indicates that they lack self-confidence and are easily misled.

With his achievement in having created the Pure Land, Monk Dharmakara circled, prostrated and reported to the Buddha, with palms together in a respectful and sincere manner. Not only was he respectful toward his teacher, but to all the Buddhas of the ten directions in the past, present and future as well.

Some people become arrogant as they learn more about Buddhism. What they really learned is not Buddhism, but delusion. All true practitioners of Buddhism have respect for their teachers. The relationship of teacher and student is like that of parent and child. Regardless of how much time the teacher spends with us, we shall never forget his or her kindness in helping to correct our faults, thus enabling us to cease doing bad deeds and to practice good ones. This is true education.

Monk Dharmakara reported his achievement to his teacher. The Buddha answered, "Excellent! Now is the time for you to speak it all and let living beings rejoice with you. You should also let the living beings hear such a

Dharma and obtain great benefit. They should be able to practice the cultivation, gather themselves in your Buddhaland and fulfill the measureless great vows of Buddhas and those living beings" (Infinite Life Sutra).

Buddha Lokeshvararaja and Monk Dharmakara portrayed the best role models for teacher and student. When this student's vows surpassed those of his teacher, the former showed neither resentment nor jealousy but praised his student's accomplishment and sent his other students to learn from him. From this, we can see the depth of Buddha Lokeshvararaja's sincerity and unselfishness.

Every Buddha's objective is for all sentient beings to become Buddhas as soon as possible. Yet, the karmic obstacles of sentient beings are so great that they block themselves from attaining Buddhahood.

The Western Pure Land created by Buddha Amitabha provides the best opportunity to become a Buddha, for those with great karmic obstacles

The true meaning of great benefit is to equally enable all sentient beings of the nine realms of all Buddha lands of the ten directions to gain true liberation. This is not only the fundamental vow of Buddha Amitabha, but of all Buddhas.



The Dharma Protector Bodhisattva



Transference of Merit

*May the Merits and Virtues accrued from
this work,
Adorn the Buddhas' Pure Lands,
Repaying the Four Kinds of Kindness
above,
And aiding those suffering in the paths
below.*

*May those who see and hear of this,
All bring forth the resolve of Bodhi,
And when this retribution body is over,
Be born together in Ultimate Bliss.*

