

# To Enlightenment-3

## Amitabha's 48 Great Vows

### Venerable Ding Hong

#### Differences Between *The Infinite Life Sutra* and *Amitabha Sutra*

Let's briefly introduce the title of this sutra. This is based on the conventional practice of expounding on a sutra; first we will expound on the title of the sutra then proceed to Chapter Six "Bringing Forth Great Vows."

This is the sutra that our Shifu, Master Chin Kung, has vigorously advocated and propagated for decades. It is the number one sutra of Pure Land Buddhism, thus it is honored as *The Larger Sukhavativyuha Sutra*, which is of the same work as *The Amitabha Sutra—The Smaller Sukhāvātīyūha Sūtra*.

These two sutras have differences in the quantity of their words, but the theory, phenomena, and the state of practice and methodology they present are exactly the same. The only difference is their explanation on the details. *The Amitabha Sutra* is very brief and is very condensed, it is not easy for most people to comprehend. *The Infinite Life Sutra* is very detailed and thus easier to comprehend. Particularly for beginners who learn the Pure Land Method, it is best to study *The Infinite Life Sutra*.

#### *The Avatamsaka Sutra*

Ancient masters since the time of Sui and Tang Dynasties of China, after comparing all sutras that Shakyamuni Buddha had spoken over forty nine years, drew a conclusion and unanimously acknowledged, "Among all sutras spoken by the Buddha, the best, the most consummate, and the most phenomenal sutra is *The Avatamsaka Sutra*."

In the end of *The Avatamsaka Sutra*, Samantabhadra Bodhisattva (one of the four most renowned bodhisattvas in Mahayana Buddhism, representing practice) guides homecoming to Sukhāvātī with his Ten Great Vows, which suggests that *The Avatamsaka Sutra* regards Sukhāvātī as its destination. In other words, *The Avatamsaka Sutra* leads to *The Infinite Life Sutra* because *The Infinite Life Sutra* is exactly speaking of the Pure Land, Sukhavati.

The Great Laity Peng Jiqing of the Qing Dynasty studied *The Avatamsaka Sutra* very scrupulously and left a work, *The Analects of The Avatamsaka Sutra on the Samadhi of Reciting Amitabha*, which was collected in the *Tripitaka*. He had mentioned that *The Infinite Life Sutra* is the middle sized version of *The Avatamsaka Sutra*. In other words, *The Infinite Life Sutra* is the condensed version of *The Avatamsaka Sutra*. Its theory, realm, and method are in line with *The Avatamsaka Sutra*. If we have difficulty studying *The Avatamsaka Sutra*, we could study *The Infinite Life Sutra* instead, because the content is the same.

### ***The Avatamsaka Sutra Is Not Easy***

*The Avatamsaka Sutra* is not easy at all. When I was twenty four years old, still studying in America, I paid a respectful visit to our revered Shifu, Master Chin Kung. He had given me a set of *The Avatamsaka Sutra*, an edition of five volumes in hardcover. Each volume is this thick. He said, “When you go home, if you are able to read it from beginning to end just once, it would be really remarkable already.”

I was eager to learn *The Avatamsaka Sutra* from him. That was in 1999, he was preparing to start expounding on *The Avatamsaka Sutra* the next year in Singapore. It was fifteen years ago. At that time, I bowed every three steps, from my dorm to Shifu's place, to receive *The Avatamsaka Sutra* given by Shifu. I brought it home to read, the result was that I did not finish it. Basically, I could not continue after reading the first chapter. Why? I felt drowsy when reading the first chapter due to being unable to comprehend its realm.

There are many deities' names in the first chapter, not knowing their Dharma implication, I felt it quite boring. So I could not continue. Shifu said to me, “If you read *The Avatamsaka Sutra* from the beginning to the end once, about eight hours each day, you can finish it in two weeks.” Look! Its size is not small at all, it is indeed very difficult to learn. It is way too big!

### ***The Infinite Life Sutra Is Easier***

But learning *The Infinite Life Sutra* is much easier. Reading it once takes just one hour. I have become very familiar with *The Infinite Life Sutra*, I feel confident about learning it well. But, to learn *The Avatamsaka Sutra*, I have no confidence. I have no clue as to what year, what month I could really comprehend it thoroughly. *The Infinite Life Sutra* is easier, easy to study and uphold. I have finally decided not to learn *The Avatamsaka Sutra*. Instead, I have studied the medium version of *The Avatamsaka Sutra*—*The Infinite Life Sutra*. Shifu is also very much in approval of my choice. With

the indriya (\*Skt., one's spiritual proclivity) of modern people, if we engage in a sutra that is too long, it would be difficult for us to study and uphold.

The medium version of *The Avatamsaka Sutra—The Infinite Life Sutra*—includes all the essence of *The Avatamsaka Sutra*. And *The Avatamsaka Sutra* is the essence of the Dharma that Shakyamuni Buddha had spoken over His forty nine years' teaching. It is the wheel of the Fundamental Dharma and the king of all sutras. That is to say, "*The Infinite Life Sutra* is the essence among all essence. We can even say, it is the essence of all the Dharma spoken by all Buddhas in ten directions." Because the general title of all Dharmas that is spoken by all Buddhas in ten directions is *The Avatamsaka Sutra*.

With this understanding of *The Infinite Life Sutra* being the medium version of *The Avatamsaka Sutra*, we realize that it is extremely phenomenal to encounter this sutra. It is indeed a day that is rare and difficult to encounter in immeasurable kalpas.

### **The Only Sutra Expounded Multiple Times by the Buddha**

The Buddha had spoken this sutra many times, what we can calculate now is twelve original translated versions. According to the record, *The Infinite Life Sutra* was the only sutra that was proclaimed multiple times by the Buddha, this gives prominence to the importance of this sutra.

It is regrettable that seven of the translated versions have been lost. Now the *Tripitaka* collection has only five translated versions left. However, to learn five translated versions is not convenient, because some of the doctrines taught by the Buddha were spoken in this version and some of them were stated in that version. One must read them all in order to learn thoroughly. For this reason, some great practitioners of the past had compiled them.

During the period of the Republic of China, senior Laity Xia Lian Ju combined all five original translations and not even added one word of his own ideas. It was totally extracted from the original translations, an excellent compilation. It is widely regarded as the best edition of *The Infinite Life Sutra* by great practitioners.

The Buddha had given a prophecy; when Dharma is extinct, *The Infinite Life Sutra* will still remain one hundred years in the world. And after one hundred years, we will still have the name of Amitabha in the world when all sutras are extinct. This name can liberate a lot of sentient beings.

For us to encounter this sutra is extremely rare and difficult. We belong to the early group who have encountered it. People encountering it during the nine thousand years after our time will all be behind us. We have encountered the best version of *The Infinite Life Sutra*!

Shifu has propagated this sutra all his life, now it has spread around the world. The number of people who are reading this sutra is immeasurable, in the hundreds of millions. Hence, encountering this sutra, we must learn it with our most sincere and solemn heart.