

To Enlightenment-11

Amitabha's 48 Great Vows

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What Kind of Mindset Should We Have When Reciting Amitabha?

When we are reciting Amitabha, Amitabha is right in front of us. It is just because we have only mundane eyes and have not recovered our wisdom eyes that we are unable to see Him. Amitabha is standing right in front of us and we do not see Him. When will we see Him? We will see Him when the time of causes and conditions are in place. We will undoubtedly see Him at the time of approaching death. So, we should recite Amitabha regularly with a respectful heart. Regard Amitabha as standing right in front of us! We should recite in such a way, reciting His name meticulously every time. In this seven-day retreat, we must recite Amitabha meticulously, smoothly, and properly. We must not recite without intention. Having wandering thoughts while reciting, this is bogus, not down-to-earth. This means that you have brushed aside Amitabha. Right?

Reciting the Name of Amitabha Brings Out All His Virtues

The fourth part of the title is "Infinite Life." Infinite Life is the name of Amitabha. *The Amitabha Sutra* states that Amitabha has infinite light and infinite life. This is Sanskrit, "A" means "no" and "mita" means "limit," thus Amita means "no limit." What is 'no limit'? Everything is limitless, it symbolizes the virtues and capabilities of self-nature. The Sixth Patriarch of Zen Buddhism, Hui Neng, after his enlightenment and seeing the self-nature, said,

*What a wonder that self-nature is
indeed intrinsically self-sufficient!*

Self-nature essentially contains all dharmas. It is a complete perfection, not having the slightest insufficiency at all, thus it is called "infinite." In *The Amitabha Sutra*, it is symbolized by infinite light and infinite life. Light represents space while life represents time. When talking about time and space, they include all.

All are infinite, including your merits, your compassion, your purity, your expediency, and the adornment of your circumstantial and personal rewards. All are infinite and boundless, Amitabha represents this meaning. Therefore, Amitabha is the virtuous name of self-nature, signifying infinite; when we recite the name of Amitabha, it is reciting our own self-nature. Ancients said, "Calling one's name will bring out his virtue." This connotes that a name will induce the virtue that it stands for.

I remember a very vivid simile told by a senior laity, Huang Nianzu, a great contemporary practitioner. His works include *The Annotation of the Larger Sukhavativyuha* - 大經解, *The Provisions for Pure Land Rebirth* - 淨土資糧, etc. I had this experience in my childhood too. It was like what my grandfather did for his sons, my uncles; building houses for them before they got married.

In the countryside, people build their own houses. They build frames for workers to stand on and then they lay bricks up one by one. Someone on the ground throws up the bricks or whatever tools are needed, such as a shovel. Whatever you need, you just call out the name of the item, and it will then be thrown up to you. You call "brick," a brick will come, call "shovel," the shovel will come. As long as you call its name, it will come. This is "calling one's name to induce his virtue." This is very visual, right?

When we call for a cement brick, the brick will come. What if you call Amitabha, would Amitabha not come? Could Amitabha be worse than the bricks? So when you recite Amitabha, Amitabha will absolutely come. Do not doubt this: this is "calling one's name induces his virtues." Mahasthamaprapta Bodhisattva said it well,

*When one is in remembrance of Buddha and recites His name,
he will definitely see Buddha at the present or future time.*

Reciting and in Remembrance of Buddha One Becomes a Buddha

When reciting, you must regard Amitabha as standing right in front of you. With this mindset, each recitation goes out from your mouth, through your ears, then into your heart. Reciting with your heart and listening with your ears, you hear it distinctly, recite it clearly, and remember it by heart explicitly. Each recitation is not brushed aside but treated seriously. With this kind of reciting, every recitation has immeasurable merits. Manjushri Bodhisattva said it well,

"The name of Amitabha includes

the consummate merits of all Buddhas in ten directions.”

So, being able to recite this name of “Amitabha,” we have obtained the complete merits and virtues of all Buddhas in ten directions.

This is not a joke! The consummate merits of all Buddhas in ten directions, we have obtained them all without the effort of blowing off dust. We obtain it simply by reciting Amitabha! As such, if we do not recite it conscientiously, it is too silly! It is like letting this great opportunity of cultivating merits slip by. So, we should recite every Amitabha meticulously, because it contains boundless merits in each recitation.

The “Infinite Life” here in the title of this sutra represents the noumenon of the eternal dhammakaya of Tathagata. This infinite life is eternal immortality, referring to our own dhammakaya/Dharma body; it is the “self-nature.” This self-nature is our intrinsic nature and it is called *dharmatā* or *tathatā* in Sanskrit.

Vasubandhu Bodhisattva said in his *Treatise on the Rebirth of Pure Land*, “This Dharma phrase (*refers to Amitabha) is a pure phrase. This pure phrase is the genuine wisdom, and it is the asaṃskṛta-dharmakāya (*unconditioned reality body, the eternal body of Buddha).” The genuine wisdom, the asaṃskṛta-dhammakaya refers to the noumenon of the universe. All things belong to this noumenon, which is also called the dhammakaya/Dharma-body. When we recite Amitabha, we are reciting this Dharma phrase, reciting this pure phrase. This means that we are reciting our dhammakaya directly; we are merging as one unity with our dhammakaya directly. In other words, we have become a Buddha!

Thus, *The Avatamsaka Sutra* states, “Reciting and in remembrance of Buddha, one becomes a Buddha.” This merit is inconceivable! If you genuinely understand that “By reciting Buddha, one becomes a Buddha,” would you still not recite Amitabha? Would you still waste even one second? Not wanting to waste even one second, your recitation of Amitabha will then be uninterrupted. When your recitation is incessant, you then become a Buddha uninterruptedly; you become a Buddha within your every thought. So, this “Infinite Life” represents such consummate merits of self-nature.

Our reciting heart is intrinsically a Buddha's heart; it is self-nature. And the Amitabha that is being recited is also self-nature. “Reciting” and “being recited” are all self-nature. We are intrinsically a Buddha, the self-Buddha; while Amitabha that we recite is another-Buddha. Yet, self and other are One, not duality.