

## The Utmost Subtle and Profound Dharma

After cultivating to a certain level, Bhikṣu Dharmākara went to visit his teacher, Lokêśvararāja Buddha and paid homage with utmost etiquette. He prostrated to Buddha then knelt and joined his palms to report what he had learned. What did he report to his teacher? He said that he wished to attain Buddhahood as soon as possible.

According to the scripture, he said, "I wish to obtain the pure voice of the Buddha, so that I can pervasively expound the Dharma to boundless worlds. I also wish to propagate the methods of śīla (\*precepts), samadhi (\*dhyana), and virya (\*diligence in one focus), to let all beings be able to comprehend the utmost subtle and profound Dharma." This means that he was hoping to attain Buddhahood quickly and pervasively spread his Dharma-voice to ten directions in order to universally liberate all beings.

*What is the utmost subtle and profound Dharma?  
It is the subtle and wondrous Dharma of  
"reciting the name of Buddha to become a Buddha."*

He hoped to establish a vast, pure, and solemn habitation, known as Sukhāvātī in Sanskrit, also known as the Western Ultimate Bliss World or Western Pure Land. He wished all beings who are reincarnated in the six paths would quickly be born into His Land to enjoy peace and bliss. This means quickly attaining Buddhahood. His aspiration is to completely liberate boundless suffering beings. This aspiration is too rare and too remarkable. Indeed, no Buddhas or Bodhisattvas have surpassed him.

In order to establish this Sukhāvātī to enable the most suffering beings of samsara to quickly come to His Land and attain Buddhahood, he said with his firm aspiration,

*Even if my body is to undergo all kinds of sufferings,  
I will never regress from my vows.*

This connotes that he had brought forth a great bodhicitta, the aspiration to realize perfect enlightenment. So, he implored the Dharma from the Buddha, hoping Buddha would expound the wondrous Dharma to allow him to realize his wishes swiftly.

## A Pure Land Obtained by YOUR OWN Effort

Lokêśvararāja Buddha had never met such a good student, of course He felt immeasurable joy and further encouraged him, “Just like a big sea, if someone were to measure it, through countless kalpas, he would be able to expose the bottom of the sea.” This means that, if one brought forth great aspiration and a true heart to pour out and measure the water of a big sea, like our Pacific Ocean, bushel by bushel after many kalpas, he would expose the bottom of the ocean. In other words, if someone seeks for bodhi with a determined heart vigorously without ceasing, he will definitely realize his wish.

The Buddha encouraged him, in the meantime, inspired and illuminated him, “You should contemplate on **your own** about which expedient ways you can practice to accomplish a solemn Buddhaland. You would know from **your own** cultivation. A pure Buddhaland should be obtained by **your own** effort.”

The phrase “**your own**” was repeated three consecutive times here. In other words, to fulfill such a great wish, it all depends on yourself. What kind of expedient ways can you practice to accomplish the Pure Land Method and a solemn pure Buddhaland of Sukhāvātī? You must contemplate on **your own** and figure out how to practice on **your own** because a pure Buddhaland must be established by **your own** effort.

## Who Is Buddha?

After Lokêśvararāja Buddha gave him such a hint, as the cultivation level and the wisdom of Bhikṣu Dharmākara, he definitely should have attained supreme enlightenment at that moment. It’s like the questions that are often asked in Zen Buddhism, “Who is Buddha? How do you attain Buddhahood?” If this Zen disciple had attained enlightenment when his Shifu (\*fatherly teacher) asked him, he would answer, the one on the other side of the limpid pond is Buddha.

That’s right, when looking at the pond, the image on the limpid pond is you. Who is Buddha? It is you. As such, Buddhahood relies on yourself to accomplish, to cultivate, and to attain.

## What Did Bhikṣu Dharmākara Relied on to Achieve Sukhavati?

If the scripture recorded that Bhikṣu Dharmākara attained supreme enlightenment at that moment, seeing through to the true nature with a purified heart, the scripture would be finished right there. If the scripture finished there, it would not be called *The Infinite Life Sutra* and would not be Pure Land Buddhism. It would then belong to a sutra of Zen Buddhism then.

But Bhikṣu Dharmākara was acting here, He truly went one level higher. What did he say? Bhikṣu Dharmākara said to the Buddha, "Such a doctrine is indeed vast and profound. It is beyond my understanding. I only hope that the Tathagata\*1, the Puṣya\*2, the Samyak-Sambuddha\*3, would manifest all innumerable wondrous solemn Buddhalands broadly.

(\*Three of the ten epithets of the Buddha:

1. Tathagata, the most exalted of Buddha's titles, thus come 如來
2. Puṣya, a noble person who deserves offerings 應供
3. Samyak-Sambuddha, peerless proper enlightenment 正遍知

Using three epithets to represent all ten epithets to express the highest respect.)

If I could hear such Dharma of all Buddha lands, I will contemplate and cultivate diligently, so as to completely realize my vows."

This answer was too wondrous! He was not satisfied with his self-cultivation and self-attainment. What did he want? He said, "This doctrine is indeed vast and profound. It is not my realm."

Bhikṣu Dharmākara was acting for us. In fact, he was fully capable of entering this realm, but he did not enter. He pleaded for Buddha's help and said, "I only hope that the Tathagata, with True and Pervasive Wisdom, would manifest all innumerable wondrous solemn Buddha lands broadly, and show me the adornment of all Buddha lands in both the circumstantial retribution and reward as well as the personal retribution and reward." He implored Buddha to let him be able to hear these subtle Dharma, so that he can cultivate himself in accordance with the Dharma and complete his great wishes.

Look! Bhikṣu Dharmākara did not rely on his own power, he wanted to rely on Buddha's power. He opened the gate of Pure Land Buddhism for us just by this request.

*What is the essence of Pure Land Buddhism?*

*It does not rely on self-power, it relies on Buddha-power.*

*Yet self-power and Buddha-power are non-duality\**

*(\*Skt. advaita. The unity of all things, the one reality, the universal Buddha-nature.)*

Lokêśvararāja Buddha “knew that he was indeed a man of great wisdom with vast and deep aspiration.” His answer had shown that his realm had gone far beyond the enlightened realm of general Zen patriarchs. What he had revealed is the supreme, splendid, and subtle Pure Land Method. It is a method that can allow all mortals to attain Buddhahood in their current lifetime. Compared to other methods, this method is far superior.

As for other methods, the sixth patriarch of Zen Buddhism, Master Hui Neng, said explicitly that he could only guide people of the top-utmost-indriya (\*Indriya, Skt. spiritual capacity). In other words, even people of the top-middle-indriya would be unable to attain accomplishment under his guidance, only the top-utmost-indriya could.

Contemplating my own situation, I realize that I belong to the middle-low-indriya, even the low rank indriya. If I chose Zen Buddhism to practice, I would definitely accomplish nothing in this life. But, if I practice with the Pure Land Method, I can attain accomplishment. Why? This method does not rely on self-power. Self-power would not be enough. Relying on self-practice, self-attainment, self-enlightenment, I would not be able to make it. But, if I rely on Amitabha, rely on Buddha-power, I would have assurance.