

Meaning of the Name “Shakyamuni”

When the Buddha came to our world, His name was Shakyamuni. “Shakya” denotes “the ability of benevolence.” “Muni” means “quietude.” These two virtuous names, the ability of benevolence and quietude, are particularly named for dealing with the problems of all beings in our present world.

As a matter of fact, Buddhas have no name, Their names are for guiding all beings. Whatever problems all beings have, Buddhas then use the corresponding “medicine.” There are two big problems of all beings in our world. The first is being selfish and egoistic. We only think of ourselves, not others. The second is being contaminated; we are impure both physically and mentally. Therefore, Shakyamuni Buddha used these two virtuous names.

Being benevolent is to be compassionate, this is especially to deal with our selfishness and egoism. How do we cure our selfishness and egoism? Do not think of ourselves! Think of all beings! We hope that the true Dharma can be long lasting to allow all beings to hear it so that they can depart from suffering and obtain happiness. This is compassion! If we can think of this wholeheartedly, we will forget about ourselves and thus eliminate many afflictions. Where does affliction come from? It comes from thinking only of ourselves. When we do not have the thought of ourselves, who is troubled? Thus, when we let go of selfishness, our vexation will be reduced by half.

The heart of all beings is impure, deeply polluted and addicted to desires and the external world. This is our karmic habit from immeasurable kalpas, it is indeed very difficult to eradicate. What can we do? We can recite Amitabha to purify our mind. When our mind has thoughts of discrimination, desire, and pollution, we immediately recite Amitabha, using Amitabha to replace all polluted thoughts.

Buddha’s name is a pure thought, when this pure thought unceasingly continues, the polluted thoughts will naturally disappear. So, when we have delusional thoughts, how do we eliminate them? Do not think of how to eliminate them, simply recite Amitabha! Because the more you struggle, the more delusional thoughts you will have. The thought of eliminating delusional thoughts is a delusional thought itself. The first one has not gone yet, a subsequent one has now followed. Therefore, it is better to ignore it, let the delusional thoughts be. We simply pay attention to our own Amitabha recitation.

Many fellow practitioners feel that their delusional thoughts are seemingly non-stop when they recite Amitabha. They say, “I do not have so many delusional thoughts at ordinary times. Why do they become so many during recitation?” In fact, we indeed have a lot of delusional thoughts all the time, yet we are not aware of them. When we start to recite Amitabha, our mind quiets down, we are then able to detect those delusional thoughts. Detecting is a good thing, how could we eliminate them if we do not detect them, right? Don’t be scared! When we recite Amitabha, delusional thoughts arise one after another, even like roaring waves, let it be! Just ignore them, simply focus on this name: Amitabha.

The Ten-Recitation Method

The 14th Patriarch of Pure Land Method, Master Yin Guang, imparted to us the method of ten-recitation with three kinds of clearness: reciting it out by mouth clearly, listening to it with ears clearly, and counting by heart clearly, from one to ten, ten as a unit. This can pull our heart together; when focusing on reciting, listening, and counting the numbers, we have no spare time to have delusional thoughts, no strength to care for other things. So, using this method, we can restrain our delusional thoughts. However, it is not easy at the beginning; once we think of other things, we definitely count them wrong. This is very normal. What can we do? Start over from one again, do not give up.

There is an approach also mentioned in the ten-recitation method. This ten recitation has a rhythm, 3, 3, 4. Amitabha, Amitabha, Amitaba, pause and go. Amitabha, Amitabha, Amitabha, pause and go again, Amitabha, Amitabha, Amitabha, Amitabha. Three, three, four, it is very rhythmical, you won't get confused and absolutely won't calculate wrong. This method is very good in my experience, especially when we walk or take public transportation. Reciting by heart with the diamond-recitation, moving only your lips, you do not need to recite aloud, others will not hear you. You recite densely in the heart, and your ears hear only the sound of your own recitation. This is genuine practice!

Whether we are busy or idle, have time or not, this method can suit us all. Using this method keeps away from the mind of discrimination and quiets down the roots of all our senses, our heart will be purified and our delusional thoughts will not arise so easily as time goes by. Once we get used to reciting Amitabha, it will be hard to have wandering thoughts even if we try. When we need to think of something, we have to do it deliberately. When we do not think of anything, our recitation is densely one after another. Even when sleeping at night, our recitation is still unceasing, we have reached the level of unceasing skill!

A True Case of Unceasing Skill

An elderly lady came to a doctor's office with quite a serious illness. After the diagnosis, the doctor told her, "Since your illness is quite serious, would you mind if I told you the truth?" She said, "No problem, I am actually quite open, you can go ahead and tell me." The doctor said, "Your illness is difficult to reverse by human power, let me introduce a method to you. I wonder if you would be willing to try? It might be effective." The elder asked, "What method?" The doctor said, "I'll introduce Amitabha Recitation to you. As long as you have faith, it can work very well." This elder happily accepted.

The doctor gave her a stack of papers with a light lotus image and said, "With this lotus paper, for example, after reciting 100 times, you then make a dot on the image. When you continuously fill it according to the pattern of this picture until the paper clearly shows a lotus flower. Then you take another paper and do the same thing! Keep reciting."

This elder, quite simple and honest, was very happy upon hearing this. She brought the papers home. The doctor estimated that she would live only about three months. Yet, four or five months later, she came back. The doctor was surprised. She said to the doctor, "The papers you gave me, I have completed them all. Can you give me some more?" The doctor replied, "Ah... good, good! Okay, I'll give you more." He said, "Keep it up! Amitabha will definitely bless you. You must seek rebirth!" The elderly lady was very happy. She did not come for her illness but for the paper!

One year passed, and she came back again. The doctor was amazed as she had become healthier. He asked, "What's going on?" She happily said, "I really appreciate that you taught me to recite Amitabha. Now my physical condition is well, there are no problems at all. But there is one thing bothering me." The doctor asked, "What is bothering you?" She said, "Now, there is one phenomenon occurring with my recitation. The sound of Amitabha seems to be gurgling out of my belly. I really want to sleep at night, yet the sound of Amitabha is unceasing. I pat my belly and say, 'Please stop.' But it still goes on reciting."

This elderly lady is very lovely. She did not know that she had reached the state of unceasing skill. She would undoubtedly attain rebirth with this skill. This is indeed a state of the roots of all senses quieting down. She had obtained a continuous pure mind.

Look! So long as reciting conscientiously, one can attain achievement in less than two years. This example has led us to believe that this method is truly phenomenal. This elderly lady did not know any principles, she only recited conscientiously and was able to achieve unceasing skill. Since we can listen to the sutra teachings and understand the principle, our accomplishment should be faster than hers. We must have faith and be willing to recite earnestly. The key is whether we are honest or not.

Thanks for learning with us. Namó Amitabha!