

The True Meaning of “Hearing the Name”

The Amitabha Sutra states, “A good man or woman who hears and recites Amitabha, and further upholds reciting His name for one day to seven days with single-mindedness, at the end of their life, Amitabha and the assembly of holy ones will appear in front of them to bless them. At the last moment, without a topsy-turvy mind, this person will then be reborn into Sukhāvātī.” This word “hear” doesn't mean “only heard of the name.” Many people in the world have all heard of Amitabha, but are they all able to be reborn? Of course not! That is not “hearing,” it is “having heard of it without understanding.”

“Hearing” is “You hear and comprehend the merits of this name Amitabha.” In other words, you must understand *The Infinite Life Sutra*, at least Chapter Six—the core of this sutra. Only when genuinely understanding it, can you then have faith and aspiration; this is called “hearing.” “One hears and recites Amitabha” implies that you use your attachment to practice and uphold Amitabha recitation after having heard and comprehended the merits of His name; you have fully possessed faith, aspiration, and practice—the three-provisions of rebirth.

The method of reciting Amitabha does not need us to uproot our attachment, it actually needs us to use our attachment. Asking us to uproot attachment, it is impossible. This method requires us to use this attachment to replace all other attachments and let go of everything else. Simply reciting Amitabha unceasingly for one, two...to seven days. This one day refers to twenty four hours of reciting.

How to Obtain Single-Mindedness Before Rebirth

Many people raise doubts after seeing the phrase “single-mindedness” in *The Amitabha Sutra*. They think it is impossible for them. Indeed, to reach the state of single-mindedness for mortals is impossible due to the heavy karmic habits of our unceasing thoughts. However, there are two translations of *The Amitabha Sutra* in history. Master Kumārajīva simply translated it as “single-mindedness.” But Master Xuan Zang translated it as “Amitabha mercifully blesses this person to make his mind free from being topsy-turvy.” So, this “single-mindedness” is obtained under Amitabha's merciful blessing, it is definitely not because this person's skill has achieved “single-mindedness.”

We must know that having single-mindedness and preventing our minds from being topsy-turvy is not within our capability due to our karmic habits accumulating for immeasurable kalpas, we simply have no way to control ourselves. Especially at the time of death approaching, the karma manifests itself, we will absolutely transmigrate in accordance with our karma if we don't recite Amitabha. So, we must seek Sukhavati rebirth in our every thought, because only our genuine faith and imperative aspiration can elicit Amitabha to appear before

us, emit light to shine on us, and give us merciful blessings. Once Amitabha emits light, the light will eliminate our karma and our minds will definitely not be topsy-turvy.

Don't be scared and think that I don't have the skill now... This is not a matter of skill. If we rely on our own skill, I can predict that the result will be as stated in the poem "Tiger with Horns." This poem, written by Master Yongming Yanshou, the Sixth Patriarch of Pure Land School, states, "Practicing Zen without seeking rebirth into the Pure Land, nine out of ten people will spend their life in fruitless efforts. If the devil realm of five aggregates manifests, the practitioner will be following it in no time."

The first sentence of this poem implies that people who practice Zen, most of them do not obtain samadhi. Even if they do, they will still not necessarily have the assurance to have achievement. Because only when revealing intrinsic wisdom can one attain genuine achievement. So, if ten people practice, nine will be wasting their time because they will be topsy-turvy before death. The second sentence indicates that the practitioner will follow his karma to the next realm, because the force of karma will draw them due to their own strength being really insufficient. Therefore, we should rely on Buddha power, particularly in this Degenerate Dharma Era.

The Power of Buddha's Light

How do we rely on Buddha's power? The premise is that we must have genuine faith and imperative aspiration. The text states, "Any sentient being, seeing my light shine on his body, will be serene, blissful, and further give rise to a compassionate heart to do good deeds and seek to be born into my land." How would we 'see Amitabha's light'? Through our genuine faith and imperative aspiration. When we seek rebirth wholeheartedly, at the moment of our departure, Amitabha will manifest before us, we will then see Him and receive His light.

As soon as Buddha's light shines on us, we will be "serene and blissful." Our karma will be eliminated, our bodhicitta will be enhanced and we will do goodness with a compassionate heart. This "do goodness" is not ordinary goodness, but the goodness of wanting to become a Buddha and to liberate all beings universally. As such, if one has genuine faith and imperative aspiration, his heart will definitely not be topsy-turvy when he is departing.

This depends on our decisive acceptance. We do not need to be scared, nor should we doubt, worry, or be polite... Some may say, "Yeah, Amitabha is so good, how am I possibly good enough? I dare not accept it." You are wrong with this courtesy. Courtesy is needed when we deal with people and matters. But with Amitabha, there is no need to be courteous. As long as He gives to us, we accept it all. He mercifully blesses us, we decisively accept all. Why must we accept all? Because we are going to Sukhāvātī, to become a Buddha, to universally liberate all beings. Does this still require us to concede? Of course not!

Ancients said, “When we encounter a benevolent cause, do not be outdone by others.” So, in seeking rebirth with genuine faith and imperative aspiration, despite having heavy karma and boundless defilements, we will definitely not have a topsy-turvy mind at the end of our life as long as we genuinely want to go. Because the power of Amitabha's merciful Vow “All will be serene and blissful when the light shines on them” will bless us and has given us assurance.

The Best Place for Refuge

If we really understand this truth, we will be full of confidence. We will have no doubt, no worry, and will not panic. We would remain unmoved as thusness even if a catastrophe comes. Do we need to seek refuge? Not at all. Where do we take refuge? The best place is Sukhāvātī. At the time of our departure, Amitabha will come, we will then follow Him. Without this kind of faith and aspiration, even if you put earnest effort into reciting Amitabha to the extent of almost having unceasing skill or even having unceasing skill, can you be reborn? No! You are unable to be reborn. What? Even with an unceasing skill I still cannot be reborn? Correct! Even with unceasing skill you still cannot be reborn. Why? You do not aspire to seek Sukhavati rebirth and you are not relying on Buddha's power; you are relying on self-power.

A Zen practitioner cultivates chan-hua-tou 參話頭, contemplating on self-nature by raising and chasing questions until all are answered, he achieves unceasing skill by chan-hua-tou while you attain unceasing skill by reciting Amitabha; both of your realms are the same. But, if you do not seek rebirth, do not have enough faith in Amitabha, or do not have sufficient aspiration of rebirth, you cannot be reborn even with unceasing skill in reciting Amitabha. Before I made this statement, I asked Shifu for advice. I am not just randomly making a careless remark here. I asked Shifu, “Is it true that without faith and aspiration, even after achieving unceasing skill in reciting Amitabha, one still cannot be reborn?” Shifu said, “Yes”.

What is the essence of the Pure Land Method? It is your genuine faith and imperative aspiration. Shifu has verified this for me. He also does not speak randomly because there are patriarchs' proofs. In *The Essential Annotations of Amitabha Sutra*, Master Ou Yi said, “Without faith and aspiration, even if you recite Amitabha to the extent of unceasing skill, being unmoved by wind and un-wet by rain, like an impenetrable fortress, you still cannot be born to Sukhāvātī in the end.” On the contrary, if you have poor skills and a lot of defilements, but you genuinely believe that Amitabha will come to escort you, and you are clearly willing to go and truly determined; you neither have any doubt nor worry, you will definitely be able to be reborn by simply reciting Amitabha.

Thanks for watching! Namó Amitabha!