

To Recite Amitabha Is to “Reite All Maha Prajna Paramita”

Buddha Amitabha used infinite light and infinite life to represent all infinities, so the name of Amitabha implies infinity. Infinite light represents space while infinite life represents time, which, of course, includes all phenomena of the entire universe. “All are infinite” is the virtue of self-nature, thus the name of Amitabha also represents self-nature. Accordingly, when we are in remembrance of Amitabha, we are indeed in remembrance of our self-nature

The Sixth Patriarch of Zen Buddhism, Master Hui Neng said, “Recite all the maha prajna paramita...” This maha prajna paramita is “the virtue of prajna wisdom,” which is one of the three virtues of self-nature, the virtue of the Dharma-body, the virtue of prajñā, and the virtue of liberation. This statement signifies that the name of Amitabha is also the maha prajna paramita of self-nature.

Why Did Amitabha Make the Vow of Infinite Life?

In the last three episodes we talked about infinite light, now we are going to talk about infinite life. Let us take a look at the scripture. Please join palms to read this paragraph, “When I become a Buddha, my lifespan will be infinite. There will be innumerable srāvakas and celestial beings in my land, their lifespan will also be infinite. If all beings in the trichilocosm attain pratyekabuddha, and together they count these srāvakas and celestial beings for a period of hundreds and thousands of kalpas; and if, they will know the number of these srāvakas and celestial beings, I will not acquire Anuttara-Samyak-Sambodhi.” This paragraph includes two Vows,

15th Vow: All will have an infinite lifespan, and

16th Vow: The number of the srāvaka in the Land will be countless.

The infinite lifespan mentioned in the scripture not only refers to Amitabha's infinite lifespan but all srāvakas, celestial beings, and bodhisattvas in Sukhāvātī. We may ask, “Why did Amitabha want to make this Vow of infinite lifespan?” Look! Shakyamuni Buddha attained Buddhahood in our Saha World, He did not make an infinite lifespan Vow. Of course it is due to the fact that the karma of all beings in the Saha World is heavy, it is incomparable to Sukhāvātī. With heavy karma, it is impossible to induce Buddha to live everlasting in our world. Therefore, Shakyamuni Buddha lived in our world for only eighty years, He manifested a lifespan similar to our average lifespan.

According to the sutra, at the Buddha's time of three thousand years ago, people's average lifespan was 100 years. Every 100 years the average lifespan is reduced by one year. Now, the average lifespan has been reduced to about 70. The Buddha left us at the age of 80.

He gave up His 20 years lifespan to bless both monastic practitioners and lay people in the future with this fortune.

If we truly learn Buddhism, we will definitely get Buddhas' blessings and the protection from spiritual beings and Dharma-guardians. Even though we do not have enough fortune, we will have enough to use from the fortune left to us by Shakyamuni Buddha. Especially the monastic practitioners, they will not be insufficient in food or clothing. Why? Because the Buddha had made such a Vow, we thus have such blessings.

Of course it will be an exception if we do not practice genuinely. As long as we are a real practitioner, we will get the blessing and do not need to worry about food and clothing even if we have meager or no fortune, because we will have the fortune that was given by the Buddha. With no need to worry about food and clothing, we can then focus on seeking bodhi with aspiration.

Gentleman Don't Strive for Food But Seek for Dao

Confucius also said, "A gentleman does not strive for food but seeks for Dao. He only worries about the lack of Dao, he does not worry about poverty befalling him." Look, even secular gentlemen have such broad minds; they practice diligently for Dao and do not worry about their food and clothing. It is the spirit of "neither seeking comfort in dwelling nor seeking contentment of eating."

We must have this kind of aspiration and backbone, only then can we resonate with Dao. If we have greed for fame, prestige, gain, and offerings, it will be impossible for us to resonate with Dao. So, even secular gentlemen know that, if one wants to resonate with Dao, he must renounce fame, prestige, gain, and offerings.

The night before I was ordained, I stayed in Yuan Ming Temple in Hong Kong. That night, it was very quiet in Yuan Ming Temple where only a few monks reside. I went for a stroll through the yard. The moonlight above me was so bright and clear, very pretty. I went to prostrate to Buddha in the main shrine and made three vows at that time. I hoped that, after being ordained, I would **firstly** not ask alms-giving for food and clothing. I would rather starve to death than ask for alms-giving. **Secondly**, I would not become an abbot of a temple. Because one would lack time and energy to learn and propagate Buddhism if one became an abbot. **Thirdly**, before I attain the state of anutpattika-dharma-kṣānti, I would never accept any monastery disciples or impart precepts. Because I would not be qualified for such a high position.

I made these three vows, hoping not to manage people, matters, and money for all my life. Learning from our Shifu not to manage these three things, I only take care of studying and propagating Dharma. I am forty years old this year. I'm not sure if I still have forty years left. If I have, I will do only one thing for the next half of my life: propagate Dharma to benefit others.

Having this aspiration, we believe that Amitabha and all Buddhas in ten directions will take care of us. We do not need to worry about what if there is no food tomorrow, how do I make money, etc... If I really do not have food tomorrow, I'll just be hungry for one day! I have done an experiment myself. I fasted. Fasting for one day was no problem. Two days with no food, and I only got a little bit weak. No problem, I still can stand it. What about three days? If I did not make it for three days, I would be reborn into Sukhāvātī. That is good too.

We have already left life and death out of consideration long ago and do not worry about food or clothing. This kind of mentality is really a big help for learning sutra teachings. Why? Because many of our delusions will be gotten rid of. We have seen many Buddhist Venerables who are busy making a living, they are no different from secular people. Perhaps they even work harder than secular people. At least, their lives are harder than my life in the past. I taught in university with great ease before. With four months of winter and summer breaks, I worked only eight months a year with six hours of classes a week. I enjoyed great ease at home.

After being ordained, my workload is three or four times higher than it used to be. And there are no Saturdays, Sundays, or holidays off. Every day is a work day. We have great joy though we are very busy, because it is what we like to do. We read the books we want and do things we are willing to do. If one is busy rushing around to make a living, that is suffering.

Infinite Life Is the Number One Merit of Pure Land Buddhism

We have just inquired, why does Amitabha want to have an infinite lifespan? It is because all beings can then receive edification eternally under the infinite lifespan. All beings, especially those who are reincarnated in the six paths, suffer extremely. They are deluded, create karma, receive retribution, sinking into the bitter sea of endless six paths. If no one guides them, they would have nothing to rely on and would suffer excruciating afflictions.

So, the great-enlightened Buddha brings forth mighty compassion; He attains Buddhahood and becomes the spiritual pillar and mentor of all beings in perpetuity. As if in a long-lasting dark night, He becomes a bright light for all beings and lights up their path to liberation. This is Buddha's great, mighty compassion. When there is a Buddha, all beings will then have a place for refuge. Look! When we recite the "three refuges," the first one is "take refuge in Buddha.

But, where is Buddha? Only when He lives in the world eternally, can all beings feel that there is a place for refuge. That is why Amitabha made the Vow of infinite lifespan, all beings can then rely on Him eternally. Moreover, Amitabha's light is pervasive, so all beings in every corner of the cosmos can all take Amitabha as their mentor for their refuge.

Thanks for watching! Namo Amitabha!