

The Infinite Numbers of Srāvakas and Heavenly-Beings in Sukhāvātī

The following is about the Vow of innumerable srāvakas and celestial beings in the Land, their lifespan will also be infinite. There is a simile in the Vow illustrating this “innumerable”: if all beings in the trichiliocosm attain the level of pratyekabuddha, and together they count these srāvakas and celestial beings in the Sukhavati for a period of hundreds and thousands of kalpas; and if they will know the number of these srāvakas and celestial beings, Amitabha will not procure Anuttara-Samyak-Sambodhi.

What will be the number of all beings in the trichiliocosm? The number is impossible to calculate by us. Only Buddhas and those saints who attain maha-arhat know. Among the Buddha's disciples, Maudgalyayana possessed the greatest supernal power, he had this skill. Within one day and one night, he would know the number of all beings in the trichiliocosm. He has this ability.

Think about it! How many trichiliocosms are out there? And How many worlds are there in a trichiliocosm? There is a study done by Huang Nian Zu who majored in science and was a professor of electrical engineering at Beijing University of Posts and Telecommunications. He had a very profound literacy in Buddhism and was a disciple of Xia Lian Ju who compiled *The Infinite Life Sutra* from all translation-versions without changing a word from the original versions or adding any of his own ideas. His compilation has been regarded as the best version by many great practitioners. He stated that if one world is a unit, this unit is equal to a galaxy.

Why is it a galaxy? Because the sutra states that the sun and moon orbit around Mt. Sumeru. Mt. Sumeru is the center of this unit-world. Therefore, the unit-world is definitely not a solar system. The sun and moon are in the solar system. Since the solar system orbits around Mt. Sumeru, the unit-world is absolutely bigger than a solar system. What is it? It is a galaxy. Since the sun orbits around the galaxy, one unit-world is a galaxy.

What does trichiliocosm mean? It means the unit-worlds of 1,000 multiplied by 3 times. One small-thousand-world is 1,000 unit-worlds, referring to 1,000 galaxies. One medium-thousand-world is 1,000 of the small-thousand-worlds, which is $1,000 \times 1,000$; it equals one million unit-worlds. And one big-thousand-world is 1,000 medium-thousand-worlds, which is $1,000 \times 1,000 \times 1,000$; it is one billion. So, a trichiliocosm is one billion unit-worlds. It is the scope of one billion galaxies. How many beings do you think are in there?

There are seven billion people on Earth. But, it will be inconceivable if we talk about living beings. Ants alone, how many are they? What about germs, right? All of them are living beings. The number of living beings on Earth would be impossible to calculate even with a computer, let alone living beings of one billion galaxies. How many solar systems are in one galaxy? And how many planets just like Earth are in a solar system? It is inconceivable and impossible to calculate! We indeed greatly admire the disciple of Shakyamuni Buddha,

Maudgalyayana, who could tell us the number of living beings in these one billion galaxies within 24 hours. This is far greater than a computer's capability.

And the scripture states that, suppose all living beings in a trichiliocosm attain pratyekabuddha, which is higher than the srāvaka... Venerable Maudgalyayana is a maha srāvaka, so the wisdom of a pratyekabuddha is higher than his. Even if their capability is just the same as Maudgalyayana and they use their power to calculate the number of living beings in Sukhāvātī... How many avaivartika bodhisattvas are there since all inhabitants of Sukhāvātī are avaivartika bodhisattvas? It is said here: “impossible to calculate.” And it is not only one Venerable Maudgalyayana, but all living beings in the trichiliocosm have become Maudgalyayana. How many Maudgalyayanans would there be? They calculate jointly with their wisdom combined together, and they do not calculate for just one day and one night but for hundreds of thousands of kalpas.

There are many different interpretations about one kalpa in the sutras. I use the most conservative one to calculate, it is about 1.27 billion years. One kalpa is 1 billion and 270 million years! And it says a hundred thousand here, $100 \times 1,000$ is 100 thousand. 1.27 billion times 100 thousand equals 127 trillion years. Over such a long time, with so many Maudgalyayanans, combining all their wisdom and power together to calculate, they are still unable to count the number of all inhabitants in Sukhāvātī.

Think about it, how inconceivable is Sukhavati? Not only is the number of all beings unable to be counted, their lifespan is also incalculable. Its space is boundless, its time and lifespan are also infinite. The realm of its space and time is simply inconceivable! It is truly as vast as the cosmic void, pervading all dharma realms.

An Even More Graphic Simile

In the verse of Chapter Thirteen, another simile is even more marvelous, more graphic, and more specific than the description just mentioned. The Buddha said that, if Venerable Maudgalyayana can count the number of all beings in the trichiliocosm in one day and one night... Now all beings of “the worlds in ten directions” all become pratyekabuddha and their supernal power is the same as Maudgalyayana—this number of “worlds in ten direction” is much bigger than a trichiliocosm—they all become like Venerable audgalyayana and work together to count all living beings of Sukhāvātī. How many have they counted? The Buddha gave the example: Those that can be calculated are like the water on the tip of a diminutive hair, and those that cannot be calculated are like the water of the great sea.

This diminutive hair is not as simple as one string of hair. It is, for example, pulling out a hair, then “dividing it into 100 pieces.” It is $1/100$ of a hair. Of course, it is not divided in length but divided vertically. Dividing one hair into 100 parts vertically, can you imagine how tiny it is? Using this diminutive hair to dip into the sea water, there would be a little water molecule on the tip. This water molecule compares to the water of the great sea—such as the Pacific Ocean—it

is disproportionate. The Buddha told us that, using their supernal power, the amount of these maha Maudgalyayana's calculations is only as much as the water on the tip of the diminutive hair, and the amount they cannot calculate is as much as the water of the great sea.

We truly admire the expedient way of the Buddha's preaching. This simile is impossible for us to even conceive, let alone calculate. So, Sukhāvātī is truly an inconceivably solemn Land. The inhabitants in Sukhavati are indeed infinite like the simile described above and their lifespan is also infinite. If we can recite Amitabha with faith and aspiration to seek Sukhāvātī rebirth, our lifespan will be as our wish; it will totally depend on the needs of all beings. We can live longer than our destiny if needed, or live shorter than it if not. We can also leave right now if we no longer have affinity with all beings here. Our lifespan will be as long or as short as we wish.

Thanks for watching! Namo Amitabha!