

# To Enlightenment-6

## Amitabha's 48 Great Vows

### Venerable Ding Hong

## The Three Levels of Enlightenment

### First Level of Enlightenment —Self-Enlightenment

No matter whether our recitation is for eliminating disasters to protect the world or seeking Sukhāvātī rebirth for ourselves, reciting Amitabha is the first and foremost important practice for our cultivation, and the purpose of listening to lectures is to help us recite better.

This morning we have only talked about one word, Buddha. The meaning of Buddha is “enlightened.” In Sanskrit, its pronunciation is Buddhaya which means “enlightened beings.”

*In summary, the word “Buddha” implies three meanings:  
self-enlightened, enlightening others,  
and the perfection of enlightenment and cultivation.*

Self-enlightened means that we, ourselves, understand the *truth* of life and the universe. What is the *truth*? In short, the *truth* is

*All phenomena are non-existent, ultimately emptiness;  
nothing can be obtained at all.*

This is the *truth*! This *truth* is very difficult to understand because it is completely opposite from the cognition of us mortal beings. We mundane people are attached to the existence of all things. We obviously see existence; there are people, things, mountains, rivers, lands, and cosmic planets, aren't these in existence? Why do you say “emptiness”? Why do you say “ultimately nothing”? So, it is extremely difficult for us mortals to comprehend.

In fact, it really is the ultimate nothingness. All phenomena are indeed empty. Using Buddha-Dharma to explain, many people will probably feel it is more and more

mysterious. Let us use the scientific point of view to explain it this time, it should be easier to comprehend.

## **Modern Science Explains the Emptiness of All Phenomena**

Modern science has proven that all substances are composed of basic particles. Before 1897, scientists supposed that the atom was the smallest unit composing substances. Later, they found that there was something else inside the atom. There are nuclei and electrons orbiting around the nucleus. Furthermore, inside of the nucleus are neutrons and protons. And inside of the neutrons and protons, there is a composition of quarks.

Scientists thought that quarks and electrons should be the smallest units that compose substance. They called them basic particles. However, they found that there was something else inside; quarks and electrons are not the smallest. They found neutrinos later. The mass of a neutrino is one of ten billionths of an electron, there is no way for us to imagine its diminutiveness.

Is there something else inside of the neutrino? There is! When dividing it again, scientists found that it is not a substance anymore. It is a kind of vibration. This vibration, the scientists described, is like the vibration of a string. When we play instruments, for instance a guitar, the string will make a note and generate a sound when we pluck the string. Different ways of plucking results in different notes. Rhythms appear and a beautiful melody is thus formed. Scientists use this metaphor to explain that substance is composed of vibrations. Different vibrations form different patterns of basic particles.

According to scientists, there are open strings, closed strings, and half-open strings, which implies that different forms of vibrations generate electrons and quarks. These basic particles then compose substances and take shape as the multitude of phenomena in the multiverse.

Substance, when dividing to the end, is indeed nothing but vibrations. Besides vibrations there is no substance. Thus, the entire cosmos is formed by vibrations. As if we play guitar, there are vibrations within every pluck, these vibrations form the melody. So, what is the universe like? It is like an infinite great symphony, composed of substances formed by different vibrations. When analyzing down to the origin, it really is "non-existent, ultimately empty; nothing can be obtained after all." This is because the speed of the vibration is very fast, but

*What in the world is vibrating?  
Scientists' research has now obtained an answer.  
The Nobel Prize winner in physics,  
German PhD Max Planck, said that  
the source of this vibration is  
human consciousness—the thoughts of our minds.*

## **Nothing Moves, It Is Our Dreaming-Heart Moving**

If we used the words of ***The Platform Sutra*** of the Sixth Patriarch of Zen Buddhism... The Sixth Patriarch of Zen Buddhism, Hui Neng, after inheriting the robe and bowl from the Fifth Patriarch, took refuge for fifteen years. When returning to society, he went to Guang Xiao Temple in Guangzhou, which was called Fa Xing Temple at that time. He saw two monks arguing when seeing the wind blowing a streamer flag. One said, “It is the wind that is moving.” The other said, “It is the flag that moves.” The Sixth Patriarch Hui Neng approached them and said, no need to argue.

*It is neither the wind nor the flag moving.  
It is your heart that is moving.*

This sentence accurately revealed the origin of the universe.

There is nothing but your heart in motion. Once the heart is in motion, it will create the phenomena of substance as well as the phenomena of spirit and nature. All arise. When our heart is not in motion, when we renounce all thoughts, all phenomena of the universe will disappear as well. That is why Master Yong Jia of Zen Buddhism asserted after his enlightenment:

*There are distinctly six paths in the dream,  
yet there is no trichiliocosm, only emptiness,  
after one's enlightenment.*

The trichiliocosm, the edification area of a single Buddha in an area of 1,000 unit worlds cubed, is within our dreams. What is this dream? It is that your heart is moving and that your thoughts are continuing one after another uninterruptedly. How does a dream start? Isn't it manifested by the motion of your dreaming-heart? Where is the real world? When we dream of mountains, rivers, lands, dream of many people, occurrences, and things, where do they come from? There is nothing originally, they are manifested by your dreaming-heart. This dreaming-heart is your heart in motion.

In Buddhism, it is called deluded consciousness. When you renounce this deluded consciousness, your dreams will all be gone. You will then become enlightened at this moment, you are awakened. It is as if we were having a nightmare, dreaming of being chased by a tiger; we were so scared, sweating all over. Someone by our side says, "Wake up, wake up." We open our eyes and see nothing at all. Where is the disaster?

*The disaster is only in our dreams.  
Once we are awakened, all disasters are gone,  
all phenomena and the universe are gone.*

The Buddha sees that we mortals are all in a big dream. He is next to us calling, "You wake up! You wake up!" Some people who really wake up find out that "it is emptiness with no trichiliocosm at all after being enlightened." They finally recognize what the Buddha said in the sutras.

*All dharmas are non-existent,  
ultimately emptiness;  
nothing can be obtained after all.*

This person is really enlightened! People who are not enlightened are still attached to the realm, regarding the realm as real and giving rise to all sorts of discriminations, delusions, and afflictions within this realm. These afflictions are all brought upon by themselves. As an old saying goes,

*Though peace reigns over the land,  
some mediocre people  
create trouble for themselves.*

We suffer from the bitter retribution of the realm of our own dreams, so the Buddha sees us mortals as "the pitiful ones." It is too pitiful! We are not awakened! As such, self-awakening is to really understand that all phenomena are empty. We now rely on the research results of modern physics, it really helps us to comprehend it.

Despite understanding it, we are still not enlightened. This can only be called "comprehensively awakened." Because we only understand its theory and have not attained that realm yet. When we really enter and prove that realm, we will then "attain achievement." We can at least attain arhathood. An arhat realizes that all phenomena are empty. Thanks for watching, see you later.