

To Enlightenment-9

Amitabha's 48 Great Vows

Venerable Ding Hong

(4) Bestowing All Beings the Dharma of One-Vehicle

The Unprecedented Joy of the Buddha

The second word in the title of this sutra is “speak.” Buddha speaks this sutra. This “speak” contains another meaning “joy” in ancient Chinese. What does it mean? It means that the Buddha is very joyful, very delighted. Why is He joyful? Because

*The reason that the Buddha came to this world
Is to help all beings attain Buddhahood.
The Lotus Sutra revealed,
“This is the cause and condition of a mighty event.”*

This cause and condition are extraordinary. The Buddha did not come to this world for other things, He came to help all beings attain Buddhahood. So when the Buddha saw the cause and condition of all beings to become Buddhas had been in place, it was the most joyful time for Him. According to *The Infinite Life Sutra*, at that time, the Buddha's joy was unprecedented, utterly incapable of further increasing. Originating exactly from the cause and condition of this mighty event, *The Infinite Life Sutra*, spoken by the Buddha, teaches us to attain Buddhahood in this lifetime.

How do we attain Buddhahood? To be born in Sukhāvātī is to attain non-retrogression until becoming a Buddha in this life. The rebirth does not happen after death, it happens when we are still alive. Even though we have not completed our lifespan, we follow Amitabha leaving happily and discard this flesh-body at that time.

*This flesh-body is false, not yourself.
Just like clothing, it has worn out,
you quickly take it off and change to a new outfit;
this new outfit is an incorruptible adamantine body.*

Some fellow practitioners asked me, "We all recite Amitabha but are still afraid of death." I said, "You have not seen through to the *truth* and have falsely regarded this body as yourself. It is not yourself, quickly take it off and discard it. When you arrive in Sukhāvātī, your body will be pure gold tinged with violet. It is the śubha* body (*Skt. pure and limpid), and the amita* noumenon (*Skt. infinit)." You can transform yourself in infinite worlds to liberate all beings universally . This state of great ease and perfection is beyond our imagination. Why do you cling to this foul and poor functioning body? That is ignorant and topsy-turvy!"

You leave this world when still living, which means you discard this body when still alive and follow Amitabha. Once you get to Sukhāvātī, you will only progress, not regress. You are the "three non-retrogression bodhisattva," a position of Buddha's successor (upcoming Buddha), known as eka-jāti-baddhā in Sanskrit. You will attain "the position of successor" in this life. The position of successor means that you are a successor of a Buddha, you are an upcoming Buddha. Whoever has affinity with you within the infinite worlds in ten directions, you will go there and demonstrate attaining Buddhahood when the condition is in place. In fact, your realm is equal to Buddha's realm, which means that you have attained Buddhahood.

With such cause and condition completed, Buddha spoke *The Infinite Life Sutra* to us. He was extremely joyful. Look, when the Buddha was about to speak this sutra, the scene was described in Chapter three—The Origin of the Great Teaching in *The Infinite Life Sutra*,

*At that moment, the Bhagavan emitted a very strong light,
just like the brilliance of pure liquid gold,
it was also like a clear mirror which could reflect images
that were as clear as the objects.
He manifested a great bright illumination,
changing in hundreds of thousands of forms.*

Why was there such a rare, extraordinary, and auspicious manifestation? Such a wondrous light being emitted, even Venerable Ananda had never seen it since he had followed the Buddha. The reason is because it was the happiest time for the *Bhagavan* at that moment. Secular people will "have a great spirit when encountering a happy event." This implies that, when experiencing a happy event, one would be energetic and his face would be glowing. So is the Buddha, His whole body glows with golden light because of the joy.

The Wisdom and Merits of Inquiring About Dharma

Venerable Ananda thus asked, “Why is Buddha's beaming appearance so extraordinary and rare today? What is the reason? Is the Buddha in remembrance of past or future Buddhas ? Or is He in remembrance of present Buddhas of other worlds?”

Ananda is very wise, he is not an ordinary person, his real background is tenth bhumi bodhisattva or above. He was born in this world with the Buddha, acting as the Buddha's attendant, and had learned from Buddha's preaching the longest. As for the level of his attainment, he attained only sotapatti-phala when the Buddha was alive. This attainment is a very low level, it is the first attainment in Theravada. But in reality, that was just the manifestation of his great potency. That's why he could speak such wise words, “Why is Buddha so happy? Perhaps He is in remembrance of someone, in remembrance of a Buddha?” Look! He knows when a Buddha is in remembrance of a Buddha, it is His most joyful time.

So, The *Bhagavan* praised Ananda, “Sādhu! Sādhu! (*Great indeed! Great indeed!) Due to the heart of commiseration to benefit all beings, you could ask such subtle and wondrous doctrine; the doctrine that you asked is so subtle that the merit of your query exceeded the offerings to all arhats and pratyekabuddhas of an entire world, and it is not a one day offering but cumulative kalpas, coupled with the offerings to all celestial and human beings as well as to all small creatures and insects that fly or wriggle.”

How many times does it exceed the merit of these offerings? Hundreds of millions of times. Venerable Ananda, extremely smart, knew how to cultivate fortune so well by just asking one question—inquiring about the Dharma.

The merit of inquiring about Dharma is inconceivable! It is much greater than giving offerings to countless saints and sentient beings, hundreds of millions of times greater. So we should know how to inquire about Dharma. It is a pity if we do not know how to inquire about Dharma. Look! Having inquired once, Ananda had attained the merit. Of course, it was due to his wisdom!

Why is there such a great merit? Because his inquiring had prompted the Buddha to speak to all sentient beings *The Infinite Life Sutra*, in which it proclaims, "Due to your inquiring, heavenly and human beings in the present and future time along with all praṇin (*living creatures) will all be liberated."

This means that Ananda pleading a question led to the Buddha speaking this *Infinite Life Sutra*, which allowed all beings in the six paths to have the opportunity to be

liberated due to this sutra. And this liberation is not a minor liberation, it is the liberation of attaining Buddhahood in one lifetime, a consummate liberation. Thus the Buddha is so joyful. This is the meaning of the word “speak/joy’.”

Thanks for watching, see you later!