

## Comprehension and Practice Are Equally Important

Reciting Amitabha helps you purify your heart. With a pure heart, you can then obtain a deeper understanding to comprehend the merit of the name Amitabha easier. Once you comprehend it, it will help you recite Amitabha with an even purer mind. They complement each other.

Our seven day Buddha-retreat manifests this characteristic very well, emphasizing equally both “comprehension and practice.” Comprehension is listening to sutra and Dharma teachings. You must comprehend deeply. After comprehending, you must take action to recite Amitabha. Practice helps comprehension, and comprehension helps practice. The secret is to use a sincere and respectful heart.

The depth of comprehension and practice for each person differs. When listening to the same speech, why would each person have different comprehension? The reason is because the sincere and respectful heart of each individual is different. It is like the rain and sweet dew falling equally from the sky to the ground. It falls on the big trees and also on the small grasses. But the amount of water absorbed by a big tree and small grass is different. A big tree absorbs a lot of water due to its deep roots, while the grass with shallow roots absorbs little water.

From this analogy we can understand that the Dharma is equally given like sweet dew falling impartially. It won't pour the rain on the big tree but give only a little to the grass. No, all are offered equally and pervasively. Likewise, two people absorb Dharma differently, the key lies in the level of each individual's sincere and respectful heart. So is reciting Amitabha. When you recite with sincerity and respect, you will easily resonate with Buddha's heart. What does sincerity mean? Sincerity is without wandering thoughts and doubt in your mind. What is respect? When reciting Amitabha, you regard Amitabha as seemingly standing right in front of you. In fact, it is not *seemingly*, He is *actually* standing in front of you. He never leaves you!

When you are reciting Amitabha, it is the time you see Buddha. When your heart reaches a certain extent of purity, you will truly see Buddha. But now your heart is not pure enough, you couldn't see Buddha even if He was standing right in front of you. It is as if the water in a lake is not calm enough, the reflection of the moon will not be seen. When your heart is as calm as a tranquil lake with no wind or wave, the Buddha will then be clearly manifested. Intrinsically, the moon/Buddha has never left and its reflection also never ceases. As long as your heart is pure, you can then see the Buddha. So, reciting Amitabha conscientiously is to “replete with the roots of all virtues.”

## Three Stages of Kṣānti

The text of the 47th and 48th Vows mentioned, “If they are unable to obtain the first, second, and third stages of kṣānti...,” Amitabha will not procure Anuttara-Samyak-Sambodhi.

What are the first, second, and third stages of kṣānti? According to Chapter Fifteen of this sutra, the bodhi trees in Sukhāvātī, containing great merits, are all transformed by Amitabha. Once the bodhisattvas in Sukhavati see the images of the bodhi trees, they will immediately attain these three kinds of kṣānti:

### **1. The First Kṣānti: Ghoṣānuga-Kṣānti**

Each being has a different spiritual capacity. These three kinds of kṣānti indicate different comprehension-levels to the *truth* of life and the universe. The ghoṣānuga-kṣānti refers to bodhisattvas who, listening to Dharma through sound, are able to comprehend the *truth* of life and the universe, realizing that all things are as illusory as echoes. This enables them to realize the thusness of all dharmas and give rise to prajna-wisdom (*\*supra-world wisdom*).

This is just like the Sixth Patriarch Master Hui Neng, during his life as a woodchopper, he entered the ghoṣānuga-kṣānti when he heard someone reading *The Diamond Sutra*. He could comprehend it without anyone teaching him. This is the ghoṣānuga-kṣānti.

### **2. The Second Kṣānti: Anulomikī Kṣānti**

After comprehending the truth, your wisdom will be revealed. A heart with wisdom is pliant. In *The Abstruse Purport of Avataṃsaka Sūtra*, National Master Xian Shou mentioned the Four Virtues of Bodhisattvas, in which one of them is “gentle and upright.”

Your mind is gentle and compassionate. You will absolutely not confront, conflict, or contradict with others. You always accommodate all beings, yet you are upright. Upright is righteous. You pursue the truth and never give up. What you conform with is the truth of life and the universe. In other words, you can let your heart dwell in such wisdom and not give rise to defilements.

At the time of accommodating all beings, your heart is pure with no contamination. You rise from dirty mud unsoiled. The dirty mud signifies all beings. When accommodating all beings, ordinary people would be contaminated. But you will not. This is accommodating with flexibility. What you conform with is the truth, not the secular way. You are unsoiled. This is the anulomikī kṣānti.

### **3. The Third Kṣānti: Anutpattika-Dharma-Kṣānti**

This is an even higher realm, the realm of mahasattvas. Bodhisattvas who attain this level dwell forever peacefully in the truth of life and the universe, which is the noumenon of non-arising and non-ceasing. They have seen the true nature through purifying their hearts. They dwell in the state of not even having one thought arise. They have returned to the Sea of Self-Nature, of Tathagata. Such wisdom is called anutpattika-Dharma-kṣānti. This realm is too high to be comprehended by us mortals, because we mortals always give rise to thoughts and our hearts always move.

For example, I am here talking about the anuṭpattika-dharma-kṣānti, you are there thinking, “What realm is anuṭpattika-dharma-kṣānti?” Once you think, you cannot obtain it. Only when you no longer give rise to thoughts and your heart is immovable can you obtain it. Once you give rise to thoughts, it is not that realm anymore, you have lost the state of kṣānti. So, what does kṣānti mean? You refrain your heart from moving or having arising thoughts, let alone from having discrimination and attachment. This kind of restraint is indeed not easy.

### Can Mortals Obtain Kṣānti?

How does a mortal do it? We can do it in a similar way, which is keeping our thoughts on the name of Amitabha; this is to obtain the first, second, and third kṣānti in a similar way.

Look! The ghoṣānuga-kṣānti means that I recite Amitabha and listen to *The Infinite Life Sutra*. After understanding it, I uphold such true principles without forgetting them. I conform with the teachings of *The Infinite Life Sutra* and further implement them into my daily life. This is the ghoṣānuga-kṣānti.

How do I obtain the ānulomikī kṣānti? No matter what kind of realm I encounter, prosperity, adversity, good, or bad conditions, I always keep my mind on reciting Amitabha unceasingly. I do not conform to defilement but conform to wisdom. Wisdom is not to forget this name of Amitabha. Reciting this name Amitabha densely and unceasingly one after another, not even giving rise to any other thoughts. You no longer have any wandering thoughts, only having this name Amitabha in your mind.

Despite not having reached the realm of non-arising to let your heart not move, you have only the thought of Amitabha. This is a little bit like the anuṭpattika-dharma-kṣānti. In fact, it is not yet. It is only a little bit alike. Why? Because you indeed do not have wandering thoughts, you only have this thought of Amitabha.

When will you enter the anuṭpattika-Dharma-kṣānti? When you keep reciting, you let go of even this name Amitabha. You have “let go of thoughts”! This realm is obtained naturally, not intentionally. When intended, you still give rise to thoughts, you will then regress! When your recitation of Amitabha sheds off, but if suddenly, you give rise to the thought of “I want to attain anuṭpattika-dharma-kṣānti,” you are doomed. You will then never attain it!

You simply recite this name Amitabha intently, expelling any other thoughts. Do not seek for single-mindedness, do not seek for anuṭpattika-dharma-kṣānti, and do not seek to eradicate defilement as well. When giving rise to wandering thoughts, ignore them! Simply recite Amitabha. Amitabha, Amitabha intently and densely,... When your skill reaches an attainment, this name Amitabha will naturally shed off.

When that time arrives, who is reciting? The heart of reciting Amitabha and the name Amitabha being recited have merged into One. It turns out that the name Amitabha being recited is indeed the heart reciting Amitabha. And the heart reciting Amitabha is actually the name Amitabha being recited. They are an integral whole!

Thanks everyone for learning with us. Namó Amitabha!