

Bring Forth Bodhicitta by Decoding Sutra Teachings

We have spent quite some time expounding on the 18th Vow due to its significance. This 18th Vow is the most consummate Vow of Amitabha's expedient skills for liberating all beings. Today we are going to expound on the 19th and 20th Vows, which are also closely related to the 18th Vow; **the**

19th Vow: One will bring forth bodhicitta upon hearing Amitabha's name, and the

20th Vow: At the end of one's life, Amitabha will come to escort him.

These two Vows particularly emphasize the importance of bringing forth bodhicitta and also give us very evident assurance that Amitabha will definitely come to escort us at the end of our lives. Let us read this Vow together, "When I become a Buddha, all beings in ten directions, upon hearing my name, will bring forth their bodhicitta, cultivate all kinds of merits and virtues, practice the six paramitas respectfully, and uphold them firmly without regression. They will further transfer the merits of their good roots, wishing to be born into my land, and they will single-mindedly recite my name unceasingly day and night. At the end of their lives, I, together with an assembly of bodhisattvas, will manifest before them to welcome them. In an instant, they will be born into my land and become avaiivartika bodhisattvas ([*non-retrogression bodhisattvas](#)). If such vows are not realized, I will not procure Anuttara-Samyak-Sambodhi." Thank you everyone!

The idea of this paragraph is that Dharmākara Bodhisattva vowed to make all beings of all worlds in ten directions to bring forth bodhicitta upon hearing His name of Amitabha. Many practitioners cannot comprehend the bodhicitta well, so of course they cannot bring it forth. They asked me, "How do I bring forth bodhicitta?" I said, "The text of the Vow states very clearly that you will bring forth the bodhicitta upon hearing Amitabha's name. Why are you unable to bring forth bodhicitta? Because you have not 'heard Amitabha's name'." This "heard" is to genuinely understand and decode it. The Pure Land School emphasizes sutra teachings very much. If we do not thoroughly understand the sutra teachings, it is very difficult to bring forth our bodhicitta.

Non-Retrogression in Position

After bringing forth the bodhicitta, you are sure to practice bodhisattva-conduct. You will cultivate all kinds of merits and virtues earnestly, practicing the six paramitas resolutely and respectfully based on the Buddha's teachings, you will uphold them firmly without regression.

The six paramitas refers to the six practices that ferry one from the sea of samsara to the other shore of nirvana. They are bodhisattva-conducts, including the paramitas of dana (giving), sila (precepts), ksanti (forbearance), virya (diligence in one focus), dhyana (meditation), and prajna ([*the wisdom to reach the other shore of nirvana](#)). Your determination is resolute, you can withstand all kinds of tests and tribulation without losing bodhicitta. You will not regress! This is all attributed to the merit of having heard the name of Amitabha.

You will further transfer the merits of your good roots, wishing to be born into Amitabha's land." This "transfer" includes transferring all our merits of practice to Sukhāvātī rebirth and to adorn the Pure Land that is the manifestation of the *true heart* of Amitabha and ours. Our true heart is no different from Amitabha's true heart. So, as we adorn our own pure land, we also adorn Amitabha's Pure Land. How do we adorn it? Simply by "cultivate all kinds of merits and virtues, as well as practice the six paramitas respectfully."

When we vow to seek Sukhāvātī rebirth, we will single-mindedly recite the name of Amitabha unceasingly. This "unceasingly" refers to reciting twenty four hours straight. When the recitation lasts twenty four hours unceasingly for one day, two days... or up to seven days, it can then be called the actual Buddha-retreat. Our retreat doesn't count as an actual retreat. We are learning sutra and Dharma teachings, plus when having leisure time, we "dignify our heart, right our mind, cut off desire and worry, as well as diligently practice with compassion in one focus." We belong to this type. It is very different from the retreat that is described in *The Amitabha Sutra*.

But for beginners it is very difficult due to not having enough physical strength. What can we do? We can start from "one day and one night." For instance, during the weekend, we can take twenty four hours to practice our skills. This is "single-mindedly reciting my name day and night unceasingly." This kind of practice is very good.

By doing so, Amitabha and an assembly of bodhisattvas— Avalokiteśvara, Mahāsthāmaprāpta, and bodhisattvas of Pure-Ocean-Like-Assembly—will appear before you and welcome you at the end of your life. In an instant, you will transcend space and time and receive Amitabha's escort. Master Lian Chi described in The Verse of Vowing to Attain Sukhāvātī Rebirth, "You will Instantly arrive at the lotus-pond in the time of bending and stretching one's arm." You have attained Sukhāvātī rebirth and become an avaiavartika bodhisattva! You felt it was just a split second!

Avaiavartika bodhisattva is called a Three Non-Retrogression Bodhisattva— non-retrogression in position, in cultivation, and in mind. What is non-retrogression in position? It refers to srotāpanna, the first attainment in Hinayana Buddhism. They will never fall into the three evil paths of samsara again. They will transcend The Three Realms and attain arhathood after making seven rounds of reincarnation between human and heaven realms. Thus, their position will not regress. In the Perfect Teaching of Mahayana Buddhism, it refers to bodhisattvas at the first stage of faith.

The reason why we cannot transcend The Three Realms of desire, form, and formlessness is simply because we have not attained non-retrogression in position.

Non-Retrogression in Cultivation

The next level will be non-retrogression-in-cultivation. This cultivation refers to bodhisattva-conduct. They make a vow to liberate all beings pervasively, practicing Mahayana. Their cultivation will not fall back to Hinayana no matter how much difficulty and hardship they encounter. They have become Mahayana bodhisattvas! Generally speaking, people who practice Hinayana regress easily because they do not have a big enough heart. However, their retrogression does not refer to making evil karma and degenerating but refers to their minds of liberating all beings.

There is a story in a sutra about Venerable. He was not willing to liberate all beings because he felt that all beings are very difficult to liberate. Later he brought forth a great bodhicitta to transfer his practice from Hinayana to Mahayana, so he went out to look for opportunities to help others. A heavenly being of Trayastrimsa transformed himself into a man and cried by the road to test him. Venerable Śāriputra asked, "Why do you cry? What affliction do you have? How may I help you?" This person said, "My mother is ill, no medicine can save her. The doctor gave a prescription which needs a very special drug primer. I cannot find it." Śāriputra asked, "What drug primer is it?" He answered, "I need the eye of an arhat."

Upon hearing this, Śāriputra said, "Good, I am an arhat. You need the eye of an arhat, I can give you one of mine." Since arhats have attained celestial eyes, they do not need flesh eyes. It is not easy to find an opportunity to help others, so he dug out his eye. But this person said, "Why did you dig out your eye so fast? I need the right eye, why did you give me the left eye?" Śāriputra said, "Why didn't you say it earlier? Okay, you want a right eye, I'll dig my right eye out for you too." The man took the eyeball, sniffed it and said, "Such a foul odor." He threw it to the ground, stamped it with his foot, then left. Śāriputra immediately regressed. The Bodhisattva Way is really difficult to practice. Look, Śāriputra demonstrated for us that it is not easy. This is not "resolute with no regression"!

Why do we regress from the bodhisattva-aspiration? It is because we attach to phenomena. We regard these illusory realms of dream-bubble-shadow-like as reality. When we regard them as actual existence, we will regress easily when encountering frustration or obstacles. We forget that "all phenomena are illusory."

Non-Retrogression-in-Mind

Lastly, there is non-retrogression in mind. This means that our heart is unmoved and thoughts no longer arise. We will eternally stay in the state of thusness—the one-true-realm-of-reality, and will not regress to the state of having heart moved and thoughts arisen due to our "every thought flowing into the sea of sarvajna." This sea of sarvajna refers to the sea of self-nature, the thusness; our every thought will return to self-nature, leading us to become a Buddha at last. This is called non-retrogression in mind.

Avaiartika bodhisattva is the bodhisattva of three non-retrogression. Once we arrive in Sukhāvātī, we will attain this level. Amitabha told us, "If such vows are not realized, I will not

attain Anuttara-Samyak-Sambodhi." Now that Amitabha has attained Buddhahood ten kalpas ago, it reveals that His Vows have all been completed.

Just think about it, we will attain such extraordinary merits once we get to Sukhāvātī! If we genuinely understand and are clear about it, how is it possible that we do not want to go? If we still do not want to go, we are either ignorant or arrogant. Ignorant people are the people who do not want all good things. Arrogant people think that they are terrific and do not need to go. Both are topsy-turvy.

It is really difficult to cultivate the Bodhisattva Way in the six realms of our Saha world, but it will not be difficult once we get to Sukhāvātī. Why? Because we would have the blessing of Amitabha. As stated in the sutra that one can edify all beings in all worlds with the armor-like great vow, and will not regress!

Shifu often reminds me, "In my life, in order to propagate Dharma to benefit all beings, I have encountered a lot of frustration and obstacles, mostly due to jealousy. People don't support you, they even vilify you; you must endure and not regress in your aspiration of the Bodhisattva." Sometimes I eat together and chat with Venerable Shengmiao, who marvels very much at the forbearance to indignity that Shifu has demonstrated. He read many patriarchs' biographies and found that most patriarchs endured much for the first half of their lives, but no one would obstruct them from liberating and edifying all beings in their later life. This is unlike our Shifu who has been impeded his entire life, because human hearts at the times we are in now are really more mean and evil than of the time in the past.

Shifu said to me, "Propagating Dharma in your generation, the hardship which you will encounter would probably be five to ten times more than mine." Upon hearing this, I was stunned. Why? Shifu said, "It is because there is no longer the traditional culture to educate people about ethics, morality, and causality, human hearts will be more degenerated, more harsh, more crafty, and more evil than in my era." To help all beings to the liberation path in the five turbidity world, how can we fulfill the aspiration if we do not forbear indignity? We really can only rely on the blessing of Amitabha. Even though we are not yet reborn into Sukhāvātī, we hope that Amitabha will bless us from being regressed with His compassion.

Thanks for learning with us. Namo Amitabha!

**Vowing for "Rebirth" Is the Supreme Bodhicitta,
It Includes All the Four Universal Vows.**