

Recite Amitabha to Practice the Middle Way

In our last episode, we mentioned that bodhisattvas cling to neither existence nor emptiness, so that they can cultivate the Middle Way. What is the Middle Way? According to Tian Tai School, there are Threefold Contemplations: Contemplations of Emptiness, of Illusory Existence, and of the Middle Way.

The Contemplation of Emptiness is that one knows that all dharmas are empty, while the Contemplation of Illusory Existence (*Skt. *māyā bhāva*) is that one knows the essence of all dharmas being empty yet is aware of the existence of these phenomena. As for the Contemplation of the Middle Way (*Skt. *mādhyamika*), it is that one conforms with phenomena and implements his great aspiration of liberating all beings—he adheres to neither emptiness nor existence—his *true heart* arises.

Dwelling on nothing connotes that one does not cling to any realm, neither emptiness nor existence, yet they still give rise to bodhicitta to universally liberate all beings. This is bodhisattva-conduct, the Contemplation of the Middle Way. How do we cultivate the Middle Way? Simply put, it is none other than practicing to neither have our heart move nor give rise to thoughts. In all kinds of circumstances, including when we encounter wicked conditions or matters, we simply practice this. In fact, this wicked condition is not evil, it is just that we mortals have discrimination and cling to the notion of “there is good and evil.” As bodhisattvas, they follow mortal’s discrimination but do not give rise to any thoughts. Amidst these wicked conditions and adversity, they cultivate “neither let their heart move nor give rise to thoughts.” This is called “forging one’s mind through various circumstances.”

Can we achieve it? Other methods are very difficult, the method of reciting Amitabha is easy. How do we forge it? Simply by reciting Amitabha! Despite Amitabha recitation being an arising thought, the name of Amitabha is self-nature; when we recite His name, Amitabha will bless us, we will then not be affected by external conditions. At last, we can be reborn into Sukhāvātī. So, for us mortals to be able to practice the Middle Way, we can only recite Amitabha.

If we don’t recite Amitabha, how can we practice the Middle Way? Try for yourself: clinging to neither existence nor emptiness, further dwelling on nothing and giving rise to the *true heart*. This is impossible for us mortals.

Mortals' minds always dwell on something, their minds cannot be non-dwelling since they always give rise to thoughts. Even though arhats’ minds can be non-dwelling, they are still unable to give rise to the *true heart* due to their falling into the extreme of emptiness. Only the mind of bodhisattvas is non-dwelling and also gives rise to the *true heart*.

Indeed, we mortals can do it only by reciting Amitabha. Ancient virtuous ones said it well, “Reciting Amitabha coincides tacitly with the wondrous Dao.” You have resonated with the Middle Way yet you are still not aware of it. This is wondrous! This realm is called “dissociating

from speech and thoughts.” We must dissociate from speech and our thinking, because the realm of the Middle Way cannot be reached by language and cogitation.

No matter how we think, our cogitation is not the Middle Way. Thus, we do not need to think, just recite Amitabha. As the ancients said, "Only by ridding the mind of gain completely, can you reach the place of impossible reaching." When we have a mind of attaining the realm of the Middle Way, we are having a mind of gain; this is not bodhi. *The Diamond Sutra* states, "One should have a mind of attaining nothing, he can then attain Anuttara-Samyak-Sambodhi."

Understanding the Realm of the Middle Way Will Help Our Cultivation Tremendously

When attaining Anuttara-Samyak-Sambodhi, we become a Buddha. What do we attain? There is nothing to attain, we obtain nothing! *Not Obtaining a Thing, Yet We Possess Everything Intrinsicly*. This is the limpid, pure realm of thusness. When our heart is unmoved and no longer arises thoughts, we have reached the place that is impossible to reach! "The place that is impossible to reach" is Zen Buddhism's opportune point. It means that the realm is unreachable by language and cogitation, it is also unreachable by the roots of our six senses. Only when we let go of delusion, discrimination, and attachment, can it then manifest before us instantly.

We must understand this realm, because it can help our cultivation enormously. Despite not being able to reach this realm, we can at least let go of the mind of gain in some coarse conditions, for instance pursuing external things like fame, wealth, prestige, offerings, and all sorts of desires that arise from our senses like lust, eating, and sleeping.

Some people have already let go of worldly pursuits, yet they pursue Dharma, supernal power, responsive signs from their practice, or even pursue enlightenment and propagate Dharma to benefit others in the future. These are all the minds of gain, we need to let go of them as well. Only when we let go of everything, can we then enter this kind of realm. After we gradually let go of the mind of gain, our defilements will then be eradicated little by little. What if we have not eradicated them completely? Don't worry, we can carry our karma along and be reborn by reciting Amitabha to seek Sukhāvātī rebirth. The defilements that cannot be eradicated, we repress them first and do not think of them, simply ignoring them. We recite Amitabha now and eradicate them after arriving in Sukhāvātī.

Bodhisattvas are able to "Initiate bodhicitta in accordance with noumenon," because he has relinquished all minds of gain. They have resonated with the Middle Way. They do not see all beings, yet liberate them all day long. They do not see defilements yet eradicate them earnestly every day. They do not see Dharma methods, yet learn intently every day. And they do not see the Buddhahood to attain, yet work hard every day. This is the state of "non-dwelling thus giving rise to the *true heart*."

According to *The Diamond Sutra*, "One Should detach from all phenomena to cultivate all goodness." We detach ourselves from the phenomena of all beings and afflictions, yet we still cultivate earnestly, and our heart is always limpid and pure. So, when the Buddha attained Buddhahood, He saw that all beings have been completely liberated. What does it mean to be "completely liberated"? It implies that all beings have all become buddhas. He liberated all beings yet saw none of them being liberated. In other words, he discovers that He liberated all beings but actually did not. His heart is limpid and pure, He does not have the notion of gain, loss, success, and failure.

Why does He see no one being liberated? Because, when He becomes a Buddha, He discovers that all beings are innately buddhas and of course will attain Buddhahood. That is to say, how could they be liberated by you? You were a being before, you have not attained Buddhahood, you hence thought they were all beings. When you become a Buddha, you will realize instantly that they have always been buddhas. Look! A Buddha's heart is limpid and pure, He does not have a mind of gain, of attaching to His merits. This is what we must learn!

Thanks for learning with us. Namó Amitabha!