

Bringing Forth Bodhicitta Is the King among All Goodnesses

It is very important to bring forth our bodhicitta. In Chapter 24 of *The Infinite Life Sutra*, “bringing forth bodhicitta to recite Amitabha in one focus” is emphasized in all rebirths of top, middle, and low Ranks. This tells us that bringing forth bodhicitta is a prerequisite for rebirth to all three ranks, we are unable to be reborn into Sukhavati otherwise. Master Sheng An, the Eleventh Patriarch of Pure Land School, wrote A Verse of Exhortation to Bring Forth the Bodhicitta. I have expounded this verse many times. I was in tears every time I expounded it. It is particularly moving. This master was really making painstaking efforts to convince us to bring forth bodhicitta. He said, “Bringing forth bodhicitta is the king among all goodnesses.”

As a practitioner, the priority in cultivation is to bring forth bodhicitta. Without initiating bodhicitta, we would have no direction. So, learning sutra teachings is very important. The study we do now is actually helping us to bring forth bodhicitta.

In the past, when Shakyamuni Buddha spoke sutras, He had already convinced everyone to bring forth bodhicitta. After we bring forth bodhicitta, Buddha no longer needs to guide us, we would know how to cultivate! Daily life is cultivation, so is dealing with people, matters, and things. The mission of the Buddha was just speaking sutras and expounding Dharma. We have never seen Him leading disciples to a seven-day Zen-retreat or an Amitabha-recitation-retreat, because cultivation is merely our own business. Buddha was only in charge of teaching theory and methods.

Forget Bodhicitta to Cultivate Goodness Is Māra-Karma

According to *The Avatamsaka Sutra*, “Forgetting bodhicitta while cultivating all goodness is called māra-karma (*demonic karma).” This is really a strong statement! In Buddhist circles, we see many people cultivating all kinds of goodness to benefit society and all beings, such as relieving disasters, helping the poor, practicing dana, building temples, printing scriptures, offering free circulation materials of Dharma, engaging in Dharma assemblies, and even supporting and guarding Dharma preachers. They have cultivated big fortunes. It is quite precious! But, if they forget bodhicitta, the Buddha said bluntly, “Practicing all kinds of goodness is māra-karma.”

This is called māra-karma, **not the karma for Buddhahood**. In other words, if we only cultivate goodness without bringing forth bodhicitta, engaging in this and that, we will become a māra in the end. The frightening truth is that our fortune will be used up one day, we will then definitely be depraved. Especially as a king of māra, he must have created a lot of karma due to mara’s particularly strong desire for controlling, possessiveness, and domination. He will be happy when things go as he wishes and get angry when things go against his will; thus he will harm many sentient beings just like emperors in the past. As the saying goes, “To accompany an emperor is tantamount to living with a tiger,” he could order a beheading anytime he was

unhappy. After killing, he **might** regret it, but it would be too late. Life had been taken away and the karma had been created.

To Learn the Bodhisattva Way, Start by Practicing Dāna

So we must bring forth bodhicitta and practice the Bodhisattva Way to prevent ourselves from becoming a māra. The Bodhisattva Way is to devote on self-liberation and liberating others by doing all kinds of goodness and cultivating sila, samadhi, and prajna in order to shoulder the undertaking of benefiting all beings. In other words, we must practice with our best capability to cultivate respectfully the six paramitas, which includes dana ([giving](#)), sila ([precepts](#)), ksanti ([forbearance](#)), virya ([diligence with one focus](#)), dhyana ([meditation](#)), and prajna ([wisdom for enlightenment](#)). To elaborate the six paramitas will take too much time, we can only talk about the first one here, dana. Because the six paramitas have their order and should be practiced gradually in sequence. To learn the Bodhisattva Way, a mortal is better starting from the first level, practicing dāna.

Dāna is to let go. First is to let go of external belongings, this is very important. If we cannot relinquish external belongings, it is useless to talk about other things. After learning from Shifu for fifteen years, I have finally relinquished external belongings. It was not easy! Through practicing dana, I had finally comprehended the Dharma teachings and let go of my job in order to propagate Dharma to benefit all beings. I gritted my teeth and let go of my professor job. I had a house in Australia, let go; I had savings, also let go. Now, there is no bank account or property under my name. What are the external belongings I have now? Only a few robes of my own. Letting go of external belongings, we will feel great ease. When we have a lot of stuff, it is a burden.

I have relocated many times in my life. I taught in two universities in America after finishing my academic studies and moved many times in America alone. Afterwards I moved internationally. I moved to Australia, then I let go of teaching in Australia and moved back to Hong Kong. My possessions have gotten fewer and fewer. At last, they are all gone. There is an advantage to relocating because you must let go. It is indeed a burden to have a “home,” it is great without a “home.” Shifu often said, “As long as there is enough food, clothes, and a small shelter from wind and rain, it is great already.” One should be content and use all his time and energy for cultivation of listening to the sutra teachings and reciting Amitabha.

A Higher Level of Dana-Practice

The first level of dāna is to give away external belongings. This is the most superficial level of dana. After taking our first step, we must go further. *Liao Fan's Four Lessons* ([*a book about how to change one's destiny, written by Yuna Liao Fan, Ming Dynasty](#)) states, “An enlightened person renounces both the sensation from the internal six-roots of eye, ear, nose,

tongue, body, mind, and the feelings stimulated by the external six-dusts of form, sound, smell, taste, touch, concepts. All things and all belongings can be all let go” This implies that all kinds of physical and mental sensations are all discrimination and attachment, we must let go. Getting cold or hot, eating well or bad, feeling good or uncomfortable, we must renounce all these **sensations**.

All things and all belongings can be all let go. Always keeping our mind calm and in peace, can we then attain dhyana gradually. No matter how big the storm outside, the state of our mind is always peaceful. Relinquish little by little, eventually we can reach the level of being unmoved and no **arising thoughts**. But we must know the principle of letting go. It is to let go in our heart, but in phenomena, **we must act in accordance with conditions**. What is “**act in accordance with conditions**”? It depends on whether it can help all beings or not. If it can help all beings, we can use it as an expediency.

Dana Paramitas Includes All Six Paramitas

Talking about **dāna**, it actually includes all six paramitas. Firstly, dana definitely includes upholding precepts. We must let go, then we would be able to uphold precepts. How could we possibly uphold precepts if we cannot renounce fame and gain? And in order to practice forbearance, it requires even more “letting go.” When others humiliate you, if you do not let go, you will no doubt at all have contradictions and conflicts with others. Once you let go, your forbearance will then naturally be achieved.

Forbearance is not just clenching my teeth and holding back when I am angry. This is not forbearance. This happens mostly with those who are cunning in our world, their forbearance has a purpose. They would think, "I'll tolerate you temporarily, just wait and see how I fix you in the future." That is not forbearance. Genuine forbearance is holding nothing in my heart. No matter how others harm me, my heart does not give rise to resentment. To blame neither Heaven nor man, this is forbearance.

Not only should we be tolerant but we should even be grateful. As we mentioned before, everything is the manifestation of Amitabha, Amitabha wants us to eradicate our defilements. It is precisely because our defilements have not yet been eradicated that Amitabha manifests such a person or such a thing to help us eradicate our defilements. We should only be afraid that we do not thank Him fast enough, how could we go against or have conflicts with Him? Will we antagonize, have conflicts, or seek revenge on Amitabha? When we think of this, we would not dare to do it. Don't we want to be reborn into Sukhāvātī? If we want to be reborn into Sukhāvātī, how could it be possible that we would take out revenge on Amitabha?

To imprint this theory deeply into our consciousness, we admit that all people, all matters, and all things are indeed Amitabha. This way, our ksanti (**forbearance**) will then be accomplished. Once accomplishing ksanti, our virya (**diligence with one focus**) will be achieved as well. We can then focus our mind on Dao and we will improve every day. Next, our dhyana

will be achieved. Achieving dhyana for enough time, we will naturally reveal our wisdom and eventually see the true nature with a purified heart.

So, we will practice the six paramitas respectfully, uphold them firmly without retrogression, and further transfer the merits of our good roots in cultivation to seek Sukhāvāṭī rebirth. Cultivation is nothing better than reciting Amitabha wholeheartedly. Wholeheartedly means without a second thought. With resolute and pure faith and aspiration, we are not distracted or shaken by other thoughts. We no longer have nostalgia for any people, matters, or things of the world, nor will we have avarice, resentment, or ignorance. All can be relinquished. This kind of mind is then wholehearted. With this kind of mind, we concentratedly recite Amitabha day and night without interruption. This day and night without interruption is not forced but naturally achieved.

There is a fellow practitioner, a Japanese, who said to me, "I've been reciting Amitabha. My ears used to have some problems, hearing noise all the time. Now I found that the noise has turned into the recitation of Amitabha even at night when I sleep." This is "throughout days and nights unceasingly," which is because he is "in remembrance of Amitabha wholeheartedly." Only when we have let go of this world, can we then obtain the state of "in remembrance of Amitabha wholeheartedly" and naturally achieve "throughout days and nights unceasingly."

"Throughout days and nights unceasingly" is not to ask us not to sleep, it is telling us that our recitation will not be interrupted even when we are sleeping. With this kind of recitation to seek rebirth, we absolutely can attain rebirth.

Thanks everyone for learning with us! Namo Amitabha!