

Why Must We Rely on Amitabha's Power, Especially at the End of Our Lives?

The 19th and 20th Vows clearly tell us the following facts: Amitabha, in His cultivation stage, vowed to enable us to bring forth our bodhicitta, practice the bodhisattva conduct, recite His name wholeheartedly day and night unceasingly. He and the assembly of bodhisattvas will come to welcome us at the end of our lives, we will then attain rebirth in an instant and become avaiartika bodhisattvas. Why are we able to obtain all these effects? The cause is "upon hearing my name."

As long as we "hear Amitabha's name," we will definitely bring forth bodhicitta. Once we have brought forth bodhicitta, we will definitely cultivate all kinds of merits and virtues, practice the six paramitas respectfully, and uphold them firmly without regression. Then, reciting Amitabha with faith and aspiration to seek Sukhavati rebirth will be natural. As a result, Amitabha will appear before us and welcome us with the assembly of bodhisattvas at the end of our lives. This is induced by our own good roots that have matured. How do we cultivate our good roots? They must be cultivated through learning sutra teachings. That's why we need to expound on *The Infinite Life Sutra to let* everyone "hear Amitabha's name."

Master Ling Zhi of the Song Dynasty said, "When facing death, mortals cannot control their consciousness." This denotes that, at the period before death, people's consciousness usually is **distraught** and they cannot be the master of themselves. Even if we cultivate very well at ordinary times and do good deeds throughout our entire life, there is still the karma of our past lives. If the wicked seeds within our eight consciousnesses suddenly manifest before death, we still have to fall into evil paths at that time.

Actually, there is no need to wait until the time of our death. Right at this moment, is it possible that we find a wicked thought arising in an instant if we carefully examine our minds? Or even worse, we might have some actions. These are the manifestations of our wicked karmic seeds. At ordinary times we are not so dazed and muddled yet still cannot control ourselves from having these wicked karmic seeds arise, let alone when our bodies are weak and our minds are feeble **at the moment of approaching** death.

Once the wicked seeds in our eight consciousnesses arise, we absolutely cannot be our own master. For instance, someone who was a vegetarian their whole life suddenly wanted to eat meat before his death. He had been a lifetime vegetarian, how could he possibly want to eat meat before death? Because he was not his own master before death; he ate meat in his past lives, those seeds had now manifested. This belongs to having a topsy-turvy mind as death approaches.

Think about how difficult it would be! Not only would we be unable to recite Amitabha at that time, we would indeed be entangled by our own evil karma. All our skills would be impeded. Amitabha knows that we mortals are indeed incapable. As death approaches, the suffering from the dismantling of the Four Major Elements—earth, water, fire, wind—of our bodies is

indescribably excruciating. Plus there is the confusion of our mind, how can we possibly be reborn into Sukhavati? Thus, Amitabha gives rise to compassion and brings forth the Great Vow of escorting us before our death.

The Subcommentary on Amitabha Sutra Annotated in Accordance with Tian Tai's Contemplation of Middle Way, written by Master You Xi, states that, even though all beings in the Saha world are able to recite Amitabha, their Delusions of View and Cognition are as strong as mighty floods. Indeed, not only have our Delusions of View and Cognition not been eradicated, but they have not even been suppressed. They cannot be controlled. Therefore, as death approaches, if we are not muddle-minded and are even able to recite Amitabha, this is not achievable by our own capabilities **but acquired** by the blessing of Amitabha's aspiration.

At ordinary times we can recite Amitabha, that is mostly our own strength. But when death approaches, our own strength is not enough, we can only be saved by relying on Amitabha's blessing to eradicate our karma, initiate our mindfulness so as to prevent us from becoming topsy-turvy. Therefore, this Pure Land Method fully relies on Buddha-power, which will be induced by our Amitabha recitation.

The Amitabha Sutra Translated by Master Kumarajiva and Master Xuan Zang

How would we be able to obtain Buddha's blessing? It is precisely due to our seeking Sukhāvātī rebirth with deep faith and imperative aspiration. According to *The Amitabha Sutra*, "When this person approaches the end of life, Amitabha and the assembly of holy ones will appear before him. At the end moment, without a topsy-turvy mind, he will then be reborn into Amitabha's Land of Ultimate Bliss." This text was translated by Master Kumārajīva (343-413 A.D.). It is translated concisely because Chinese people like to keep things simple, the text thus avoids being too wordy. But sometimes it is not easily comprehended if it is too simple.

The translated version of *The Amitabha Sutra* from the Tang Dynasty by Master Xuan Zang (602-664 A.D.), titled ***The Sutra of Praising the Pure Land Buddha Who Escorts All Beings***, is more specific. The style of his translation is sentence by sentence, word by word, loyal to the original text. It is different from the one Master Kumārajīva did. Master Kumārajīva paraphrased, using sense-for-sense translation. So, the writing of Master Kumārajīva is very fluent. It is particularly liked by Chinese people due to its simplicity complying with Chinese people's tastes and their language syntax. It is very beautiful but some meanings, if scrutinized word by word, are not as clear to the original sutra as those of the translation of Master Xuan Zang.

Of course both have nothing wrong with their meaning. Yet we do not necessarily see its implications if it is too simple.

According to the translation from Master Xuan Zang, "As death approaches, Amitayus along with innumerable disciples of sravakas and bodhisattvas, surround and dwell before those good men or women, giving them compassionate blessing to prevent their minds from becoming topsy-turvy."

So, how can we keep our mind from becoming topsy-turvy? It is because Amitabha, along with innumerable sage disciples of sravakas and bodhisattvas, appear before us and give us compassionate blessings. As death approaches, we would really lack the power of concentration. This "prevent us from having a topsy-turvy mind" is helped by Amitabha, it is not because we have dhyana* (*Skt. a deep level of concentration) to prevent ourselves from having a topsy-turvy mind.

Have Infinite Joy to See Amitabha at the End of Life

The scripture of *The Compassionate Lotus Sutra* (Skt. *Karuṇāpuṇḍarīka-sūtram*) also has similar text. Despite not being included in the Five Pure Land Sutras, it also speaks of the Sukhāvātī rebirth in detail. Its text states, "At the end of one's life, the holy assembly and I will surround and manifest before him. This person sees me and obtains jubilation in his heart before me." As we know, Buddha light has twelve epithets, one of them is "the light of joy"; as soon as we see Amitabha and receive His light, we will be blissful. This is really the case.

It would be a relief to see Amitabha at that time. As the sutra states, at this time Amitabha "enters the Samadhi of Wuyi," which means the Samadhi of Un-Obstruction. Samadhi is a great dhyana. Due to this samadhi, Amitabha speaks Dharma before this person. Amitabha emits light on him and also speaks Dharma for him. But, only he can hear this Dharma talk, his friends and relatives by his side do not hear it because they did not see Amitabha. Only he sees Amitabha.

As I reported to you previously, on the 23rd of last month I helped with the rebirth for senior Laity Huang Jinxuan by reciting Amitabha with him. After he had recited for four days, Amitabha came and said to him, "I will come to escort you in two days, you still have two days." This is speaking Dharma for him. He felt rest assured after having heard this. Wouldn't you feel infinite joy at that time? Your reincarnation through innumerable kalpas will be ended now. You will exit from the sea of misery forever, be reborn into Sukhāvātī, and become a Buddha. That joy is truly indescribable.

At this time, Amitabha, in His samadhi, emits light on him and speaks Dharma for him. All his defilements are eradicated instantly after hearing the Dharma, he therefore gives rise to mighty joy. Amitabha speaking Dharma at that time is not necessarily using language. The light itself is also "speaking Dharma." When the light shines on him, he understands everything. His heart resonates with Amitabha's. Language is not needed anymore. That is why he feels mighty joy. And he will attain the Samadhi of Reciting Amitabha. Due to the strength of this samadhi, he

is able to recite my name and attain anutpattika-dharma-kṣānti (*the realization of non-arising, is realized by the bodhisattva in the eighth bhumi, the stage of immovability). After his life comes to an end, he will definitely be reborn into my land.”

This text in *The Compassionate Lotus Sutra* states it even more clearly. It asserts to us that we become avaivartika bodhisattva instantly while we are still in this world. We have not yet been reborn, we are avaivartika bodhisattva at that time, and we will undoubtedly be born into Sukhāvātī at the end of our life.

The comparison of these different scriptures helps us to see explicitly that, during the process of rebirth, we utterly rely on the power of Amitabha’s compassionate blessing to prevent our heart from becoming topsy-turvy. Amitabha’s blessing also allows us to eradicate all defilements and to bring forth mighty joy. We thus are able to keep our mindfulness and receive His escort. This is the Vow of “Amitabha will come to escort him at the end of his life.”

We seem to always feel insecure and unsure, especially those whose family are not learning Buddhism. Can I make it? What if my karmic creditors come for me? These doubts are actually caused by not thoroughly understanding Amitabha’s Vows. Hence, we do not have faith and do not dare to undertake it. When we truly “hear Amitabha’s name” and understand the essence of His Vows, we will feel surefooted and perceive inner ease. We no longer need to worry about “Will Amitabha come to escort me at the end of my life,” but only need to worry whether or not we have genuine faith and imperative aspiration.

Doubts are obstacles, we must not have any doubt. So, if we do not want to regress due to having doubts, we must practice earnestly by reciting Amitabha, eradicating evilness, cultivating goodness, introspecting, repenting, and rectifying our thinking and doings every day. If we do not cultivate conscientiously, only thinking that our faith and aspiration is already genuine and imperative, our thoughts might be wrong.

Thanks everyone for learning with us! Namō Amitabha!