

Making Listening to Sutra Teachings the Primary Work

My father is now also learning and practicing in a Dharma Center, and I also let him listen to the sutra teachings. He now loves to listen to my speech on *The Infinite Life Sutra*. He has listened to it three times so far. *The Infinite Life Sutra* I elaborated on—60 episodes, 120 hours—is interpreted in a clear and simple way, easy to understand. My father loves it. I said to him, “You now must make listening to the sutra teachings your primary work.”

In the past, he regarded “reciting Amitabha” as his primary work but recited without intent. According to the fellow practitioners, he is easily distracted by the view outside the window, and he would play with his watch or strike the bell, doing this and that. Often, he recited for a short time and would go back to his room to take a nap. Once he went to sleep, it was usually for many hours. This is because he is not clear about the merits of the name, so he was not willing to recite Amitabha with a resolute determination.

If one really understands the merits of the name, he would not even let one second slip away, because every Amitabha you recite, you earn the merit of this very recitation. Ancient virtuous ones said, “This name of Amitabha contains all merits of all Buddhas in ten directions.” What in the universe has more merits than this?

Reciting one time you earn the merit of one recitation. Reciting ten times you earn the merits of ten recitations. Each recitation includes infinite merits. Those who recite Amitabha are also blessed and safeguarded by all Buddhas. To what extent is this great merit? Even the mortal who is falling into hell, with just a few recitations, he will ascend to Sukhāvātī. This is truly an inconceivable merit.

If we understand and are clear about all the merits of this name, we will recite by ourselves without anyone pushing us. For those who are not willing to recite, it is all due to not yet “hearing Amitabha’s name.” So I now let my father change the way of practice, which is listening to the sutra teachings as his primary practice.

It is okay even if he does not recite Amitabha as long as he listens to the sutra teaching. Once he clearly understands the sutra, he will recite by himself. The ancient virtuous ones said, “If you recite Amitabha with an indecisive mind toward rebirth, it is futile even if you shout till your throat is hoarse”. If you force him to recite 100 thousand recitations a day, he still cannot be reborn, because his heart is not in it. So, why must we “hear the name”? This is the reason.

If we carefully look into the Forty Eight Vows of *The Infinite Life Sutra*, how many of them are about “upon hearing my name”? My guess is close to half. So, Amitabha emphasizes the most on “upon hearing my name.” “Upon hearing the name” obtains the most blessings from Amitabha. You all are particularly fortunate, you came here to “hear the name.” You obtain Amitabha’s blessing and eliminate immeasurable karma with every recitation. When you go home, your good roots will grow strong, your faith and aspiration will be resolute, and you will

attain non-retrogression and get the blessings from all Buddhas in ten directions. As such, world-protection and disaster-relief will become a small, trivial matter.

The Pure Land Method— Hard to Comprehend Yet Easy to Practice

So, we must make all these matters clear. Once we are clear on the direction of our learning and practice, it will be really easy to be reborn into Sukhāvātī—as easy as turning our own palms. Because this method does not require us to eliminate karma and to eradicate our defilements; it allows us to carry our karma to be reborn. However, this is a method of “being easy to practice yet hard to comprehend.” It is particularly hard to get a genuine understanding.

I am here specifically stressing “upon hearing the name,” but it is not saying that the practice of reciting Amitabha does not need to be stressed. Amitabha recitation is also very important because the practice of reciting Amitabha helps us to increase and retain our faith and aspiration due to the Buddha’s blessing. Without practicing recitation, it is only a literal comprehension; that is not truly “upon hearing the name.” “Upon hearing the name,” is that we truly understand the merit of this name, set our minds on the land, and thus recite Amitabha spontaneously and naturally.

So, what is “upon hearing the name”? Only when we keep Amitabha in remembrance day and night and only think of going to Sukhāvātī—when this thought never ceases—we can then bring forth the bodhicitta, firmly uphold it without regression, and further plant the roots of all virtues to transfer our merits with utmost sincerity. Only then can we truly be regarded as “upon hearing the name.”

If we do not reach this level, it indicates that our “hearing” is still not enough. What can we do? Keep listening and must do it with extreme sincerity and respect. Because only when we have a sincere heart, can we *hear* the essential doctrine of the merit of this name. Without a sincere and respectful heart, it is very difficult to comprehend the doctrine. How can the Buddha’s doctrine be comprehended? According to Master Yin Guang, “With ten percent sincerity and respect, we gain ten percent benefit; with one hundred percent sincerity and respect, we gain one hundred percent benefit.” Only when we have 100% sincerity and respect, can we then possibly understand the doctrine. Otherwise we would not be able to understand it. We thought we understood it, we might fool ourselves without knowing it.

Despite being a literal language, the Sutras transcend literal language. Its doctrine is hidden beyond the literal language. That’s the reason we also need to stress the cultivation of reciting Amitabha to implore blessings. This cultivation helps us bring forth our sincerity so that we can comprehend the merits while we are “upon hearing the name.” we must deeply comprehend it and implement it. When comprehending a little, we implement it into our daily life a little; comprehending one sentence, we implement that one sentence. After we have implemented it into our daily life, it will help us comprehend deeper. So, when we have implemented ten percent, we can then say that we understand ten percent. Whatever we have

not implemented, it cannot be considered a real comprehension because comprehension and cultivation are complimentary.

A Way to Examine Our “Hearing” and a Good Method to Learn Sutra Teachings

How do we examine our “upon hearing the name”? Have you brought forth the bodhicitta? Are you firmly upholding it without regression? Do you transfer your merit with utmost sincerity? Are you keeping Amitabha in remembrance? If you have not yet done so, you still have not comprehended the name completely. You must use a more sincere heart to listen to the sutra teachings and practice Amitabha recitation imperatively.

As the saying goes, “In Buddhism, every prayer will surely be responded to.” I am now elaborating on *The Infinite Life Sutra* and often encounter the following situation. When a paragraph seemed unclear, and I seemed to have some hindrance and could not comprehend it thoroughly. What can be done? After checking all the references and still not finding the answer, I would then prostrate to Buddha; the meaning usually arises after I prostrate 300 to 500 times. This is “invoking blessings with utmost sincerity.” We must use this method to enter the doctrine.

Now I follow Shifu in Hong Kong and listen to his preaching for four hours every day. He speaks for four hours, I listen to it for four hours. I prostrate while listening. Shifu speaks in the studio, I stay outside and see him on the big screen. I prostrate to Buddha and also prostrate to Shifu. Each day, I prostrate over 1,000 times within these four hours, it eliminates my karma exceedingly. As I prostrate, one after another, all the meanings that Shifu expounded have become clear. Why? You use the utmost sincerity and respect.

This method is quite good, you may use it. Get rid of all wandering thoughts in your mind, you implore for Buddha's blessing while listening. If you can prostrate four hours a day, you will have enough exercise. You will be covered with sweat, it is really detoxing. Your karma will also be eliminated. Your whole body will feel very light.

It is a little hard in the beginning. If you cannot prostrate 1,000 times, you can go slowly and increase gradually. If you can retain it, keeping it up for three years, you may get enlightened.

Thanks everyone for learning with us. Namó Amitabha!