

## 22nd to 24th Vows

Next, let us take a look at the 22nd Vow: No females in the Land, 23rd Vow: She will detest her female body and transform into a man, and 24th Vow: All will be born through transformation in lotus flowers. When we expound these Vows, many people often raise questions. Why are there no women in His land? Does Amitabha regard women as inferior to men?

We must know that there are men and women in our world, what implication does this have? This is the major regress-condition for our cultivation. To cultivate in this Saha World is really not easy. One of the most serious problems is that there are men and women. When there are men and women, there will be lust. This lust is the biggest obstacle in learning Dao, and it is the *root-cause* of our birth-death reincarnation. If we do not relinquish this lust, it is very difficult for us to transcend from samsara. This lust specifically refers to the lust between men and women.

The Chapter of Clear Teaching on Four Kinds of Purity from *The Śūraṅgama Sūtra* mentions that among these clear teachings on eradicating lust, killing, stealing, and lying, the foremost is to eradicate lust. This teaching was implored by Venerable Ananda who truly earned great merit. One time, he went alone to beg for alms and came to a lustful woman's house. That woman saw that Ananda was so handsome and graceful, she immediately had strong affection toward him.

After Ananda left, she could not help thinking of him. She told her mother. The mother loved her daughter dearly and said, "I know the mantra of the Former Brahma Heaven. This mantra can captivate a man and make him lose his mind." She then taught her daughter this mantra. The second time Ananda left the Sangha alone and went out to beg for alms again, this lustful woman began to recite the mantra when he walked past her house.

Ananda is a manifestation of a mahasattva\* ([\\*a great bodhisattva who has reached at least the seventh bhumi](#)), he is not an actual mortal. But, since he manifested as a mortal, of course he would have moments of bewilderment. When the woman started to chant the mantra, Ananda felt confused and was led to the woman's house. The moment when Ananda was on the brink of violating the precept, the Buddha quickly sent Manjusri Bodhisattva to bring the Śūraṅgama Mantra to the location. When the Śūraṅgama Mantra was chanted, the mantra of the Former Brahma Heaven disintegrated. Ananda, as if awakening from a dream, felt so ashamed that he immediately went back to the Sangha and repented to the Buddha.

## Eradicating Lust Physically and Mentally

According to *The Śūraṅgama Sūtra*, one must uphold the Four Kinds of Clear Teaching on Purity in order to transcend The Three Realms. The foremost Clear Teaching on Purity is to eradicate lust. The Buddha said, "You must eradicate lust, physically and mentally, to the extent

of not feeling that you are eradicating it; only then can you have hope to attain the bodhi of all Buddhas.”

“Have hope” implies to have the possibility. In order to attain the bodhi of all Buddhas, we must eradicate lust not only in physical conduct but lustful thoughts in our minds. We must uproot even our most subtle thoughts because these thoughts will impede us from transcending The Three Realms.

Venerable Ananda must have been a manifestation of a mahasattva. His real status was not revealed but he must be at least the position of the bodhisattva of tenth bhumi. In *The Infinite Life Sutra*, Buddha Shakyamuni praises Ananda, "The question you ask now is greater than making offerings to all arhats and pratyekabuddha of the entire world, plus giving offerings through cumulative kalpas to celestial beings of all heavens..." His merit is too enormous. Who has such great wisdom to ask and induce *The Infinite Life Sutra*? If he is not a mahasattva, he would not be able to ask this question.

Ananda, at the Buddha's time, only attained srota-āpatti, the fruition of stream enterer, which is the first stage of enlightenment in Theravada. How could the wisdom of a srota-āpatti possibly bring out such a great sutra by just asking one question? So, Ananda is a manifestation of a mahasattva. He knew that this karmic habit of all beings is deeply rooted, he thus acted on purpose, using this condition to let the Buddha tell us how to transcend samsara. We must uproot the fundamental root of our lustful mind, because the lustful mind between men and women is the biggest obstacle in cultivating Dao.

Buddhist scriptures also point out: it is fortunate that the lust of all beings is only this one! If there is another defilement as big as this one, all beings would have no hope to obtain liberation.

When Dharmākara Bodhisattva conducted a survey in all worlds of ten directions, he found that many worlds with men and women were usually neither pure nor peaceful. The works of Preceptor Dao Xuan in the Tang Dynasty had a statement which was cited from Classics and Sutras. It states, "Hells exist where there are women." It is a pity that some scriptures have been lost to the world, we cannot find their origin. But this Preceptor was known for upholding precepts extremely strictly, he absolutely would never fabricate these words. Why does it say so? Because where there are women, there are men. And impure lust arises between men and women. This impure lust is the root of falling into hell. So, if we do not keep away from lust, we cannot prevent ourselves from falling into hell.

In fact, the form of a male or female body in our reincarnation is constantly changing, but we are always deluded. This life when we have a male body, we naturally have impure lust when seeing a woman, and if we have a female body, we also easily have impure lust when seeing a man. This has been our karmic habit since beginningless kalpas. Even in the last life some might have been father-daughter or mother-son to each other but become husband and

wife in this life. Why? They harbor love towards each other. This love draws them to meet together, making them give rise to impure love.

After becoming truly awakened, we will feel quite filthy and ashamed of this impure lust between men and women. Why? Look! Last life they were father and daughter or mother and son, becoming husband and wife in this life. Think about it, what sense does this make? Or, being enemies in the last life yet often fight. They will definitely fight because they are karmic debtors and creditors to each other. Thinking through this over and over, it really makes no sense at all. We really should renounce this six paths' samsara.

### **Deep Affection-Attachment Causes Women to Suffer More**

Compared to men, the karma of women is heavier. This is not discrimination towards women. What is karma? You have more suffering, this is karma. Let us take the body as an example. The physical body of a man is easier to take care of while the body of a woman has more trouble. The monthly period as well as giving birth to children after they get married are all troublesome and much suffering. Men do not need to deal with these things. Men and women cannot be equal in this regard. This is an indisputable fact. Can men naturally give birth to children? Since they cannot, it is unequal. Therefore, we cannot ignore reality and talk about an unrealistic equality.

In regard to equality, the Buddha has given us the best interpretation: All beings are innately buddhas, all are equal. This impartiality stated by the Buddha is the most ultimate and most consummate. Yet, the manifestations of all beings depend on their karma and its effect. Their karmic retribution will not be equal. However, we should remain in a state of impartiality both physically and mentally. We should not blame fate and others within our karmic retribution, instead, we should eliminate past karma in accordance with conditions and never create new ones again. In this life, whether we have a male or female body, are healthy or sickly, we have received this body, it is better to “eliminate our past karma in accordance with conditions and never create new ones again,” just seeking Sukhāvātī rebirth wholeheartedly.

### **Neither Male Nor Female**

What kind of pure body would it be without gender? It is an incorruptible adamantine body—the body of śubha (\*purity & nihility) and the noumenon of amita (\*infinity). It is the body of purity and nihility. You want it to be a man, it transforms into a man. You want it to be a woman, it can transform into a woman as well. It can, as Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva does, “respond to all beings' minds to manifest the state in accordance with the capacity of all beings' perception.”

Is Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva a man or a woman? There is clearly a female image of Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva, how can you say that she is a man, right? But, if you say

Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva is a woman, she also manifests as a man. So, He is neither male nor female. His manifestation of male or female is in accordance with the discrimination and attachment of all beings.

In Sukhavati, there is neither discrimination nor attachment. The inhabitants do not have a differentiating mind. They all have bodhisattvas' bodies, which do not have a certain form. They can manifest the form of a man or a woman. They can manifest the forms of sentient beings and insentient beings as well. They can manifest everything, even the form of a mountain, river, land, tree, flower, or grass.

Nāgârjuna Bodhisattva once said, "Body is the root of suffering." The female body especially is the most suffering among all sufferings. What should you do? You should detest this female body. Why does one obtain the female body? Deep affection-attachment will cause one to obtain a female body. That's why women usually use their emotions to deal with things. Generally speaking, men are relatively more rational. You may say, "No, some men also have deep attachment to affection." Of course there are probably more and more men nowadays with deep affection-attachment, they would very possibly become women in the next life. So, with deep affection-attachment, you will become a woman. Conversely, if a woman relinquishes the affection-attachment, she can then transform from a woman into a man in the next life.

Thanks everyone for learning with us, Namô Amitabha!