

The Three Types of Practitioners

There are three different kinds of practitioners that we ought to mention here. First are those who have firm determination for ultimate enlightenment (*Skt. *niyata-rāṣi*), second are those who engage in deviated activities (**mithyātvā-rasi*), and third are those whose destiny for enlightenment is yet to be determined (**aniyata-rāṣi*).

“Having firm determination for ultimate enlightenment” is the non-retrogression that we just mentioned. They do not regress from the bodhi path. Those who engage in deviated activities fix their minds on the activities of the six paths. They create karma and receive retribution amidst the six paths, and thus have no way to escape. Those between these two types are irresolute and fickle toward enlightenment.

Think about ourselves! Is our doing and thinking now in the firm determination of enlightenment or of the deviated activities of the six paths? If your mind is in firm determination for enlightenment, you are unwavering to attain Sukhāvātī rebirth to become a Buddha.” You are resolute for enlightenment. If you now still have a lot of discrimination and attachment, still have a lot of greed, resentment, ignorance, arrogance, and still obsess on the external pursuits such as wealth, lust, fame, and food, then you belong to the genre who fix their minds on the activities of the six paths. You will surely stay in the six paths of samsara in the future.

According to *Awakening of Mahāyāna Faith*, practitioners before reaching the cultivation levels of the First Abode are the genre who engage in the activities of the six paths. As described in the sutra, they are like spring pussy willows, flowing up and down in the wind. Sometimes they may find their heart for bodhi is very vigorous, they can let go of everything, yet after a period of time they find that they really can do nothing. They go up and down unsteadily. Many fellow practitioners have this feeling. I have such feelings of up and down as well. What is this? Uncertainty. This uncertainty indicates that we do not have assurance of Sukhavati rebirth.

The Rebirth of Huang Zhongchang —a Testimony of Firm Determination

People who have genuine assurance toward rebirth, their hearts are unmoved and certain. They will absolutely not be tempted by external stimuli. There is an amazing practitioner, Huang Zhongchang, who demonstrated this kind of determination to us.

In 2003 Huang Zhongchang, in his thirties, brought forth aspiration to be the **testimony** of Shifu's preaching. Believing in Shifu's proclamation, he aspired to seek rebirth by embarking on a three-year retreat to recite Amitabha. Due to thoroughly comprehending the sutra teachings, he could truly let go. He began to recite Amitabha and **refrain himself from speech during his retreat**. This denotes that he had fully attained the merit of “hearing the name.” On June 9, 2006, two months shy of three years of his plan, he attained *rebirth*. This result had testified the

teachings of Pure Land Patriarchs: one will definitely be reborn if he recites Amitabha conscientiously for three years.

Refraining from speech is very beneficial. When we speak, our minds will be drawn outside; once we refrain from speech, our minds will then be pulled back. Generally, a seven-day retreat requires refraining from speech in the chanting hall. Random speech is not allowed because your mindfulness will be ruined when speaking. As ancient virtuous men told us, "One less word spoken, one more Amitabha recited; when all thoughts are exterminated, your dharmakaya (*Dharma Body) will be revived."

Under the support and guard of Curator Xiang, Huang Zhongchang and dozens of practitioners started the retreat. At the end of his life, a woman came to look for trouble. She said that Huang Zhongchang had harassed her. She spread slanderous rumors, turning the whole retreat bodhimanda (*a place where religious practice is carried out) upside down. She yelled at Huang Zhongchang every time she saw him. Everybody knew that there was no truth to it, but that woman was just neurotic, pointing a finger at Huang Zhongchang and yelling at him every day. Huang Zhongchang ignored her, still refraining from speech and reciting Amitabha.

One time, during a meal, when rice and vegetables were all on the table, that woman came to him suddenly. She threw all his food to the floor and stepped on it. She accused him of harassing her again. Huang Zhongchang still continuously recited Amitabha and did not even give her one glance. When that woman was tired of yelling, she left. Huang picked up all the rice and vegetables from the floor, put them in his bowl and ate quietly. The next day, this karmic creditor had probably gotten all her credits. She cursed with resentment while leaving the bodhimanda. The next day, Huang Zhongchang was reborn.

Look! His heart was always unmoved, not being disturbed by external realms. No matter how the woman yelled at him and harmed him, he still quietly recited Amitabha. This is the firm determination for ultimate enlightenment. His mind was truly fixed on seeking Sukhāvātī rebirth. We must temper this kind of mind at all times. Do not let external realms disturb us!

What Does a Person Who Has Brought Forth Bodhicitta Look Like?

Mahāsthāmaprāpta Bodhisattva urges us, "Converge the roots of our six senses to allow our pure thoughts continuously." This is telling us to withdraw the roots of our six senses from the external realm and pull them together. It refers to focusing on reciting Amitabha to have this pure thought in continuity. We do not need to wait until Sukhāvātī rebirth to attain the firm determination for ultimate enlightenment (*niyata-rāśi); right now, before rebirth, we can attain firm determination for ultimate enlightenment already. As Master Ou Yi said, "As long as we now recite Amitabha with faith and aspiration to seek Sukhāvātī rebirth, we are no longer a person of the Saha world. We are already a person of Sukhāvātī!" So, this Amitabha's Vow will bless us to

bring forth a genuine aspiration to seek Sukhāvātī rebirth, we will then attain non-retrogression in this life. In other words, at the present time we have become non-regressed!

According to *The Infinite Life Sutra*, the rebirth of three ranks all emphasize “bringing forth bodhicitta and reciting Amitabha with one focus.” What does a person who has brought forth bodhicitta look like? He has only one direction, one goal: to see Amitabha, to go to Sukhāvātī. This way, you will forever depart from affliction and suffering, and your heart will be pure and cool. The bliss you receive will be like that of a bhikṣu who has “extinguished all defilements” (*niṣparidāha). We can imagine that, when Huang Zhongchang was accused, slandered, and yelled at, his heart was still pure and cool with no heated affliction.

Affliction makes your body temperature rise. When one’s affliction arises and he gets angry, his face will flush scarlet. The nature of affliction is **hot, it is a heated affliction.** People with no afflictions, their hearts are cool and at ease. We must practice at ordinary times. No matter what we encounter, we must keep our heart placid. Nothing is a big deal in the world. Do not let anything throw you into a state of extreme **anxiety.** As long as our heart does not dwell on this world—in other words, once we let go and do not control, possess, and dominate any people, matters, or objects—our heart will then be pure and cool.

Practicing to Let Go by Taking Two Steps

Some fellow practitioners ask, “I understand whatever theory you say, but I just can’t let go. What can I do?” The main problem is that you have not yet understood the sutra teachings. You have not “heard the merits of Amitabha’s name” enough. After listening to the sutra teachings, more importantly, you must *genuinely practice*. *Practicing genuinely* is to let go. Understanding ten percent from listening, you must let go of ten percent. If you do not *practice genuinely*, you do not understand the profound meaning of the sutra after all.

If you cannot let go at once, I persuade you to take it easy. Do not be nervous, start by taking it easy. Shifu teaches us, “See through it, let it go.” I do it with two steps. The first step is to see it lightly when having difficulty seeing through it, and we take it easy when having difficulty letting go. This is relatively easier. The second step is to eventually see through it after continuously seeing it lighter and lighter.

What is worth to **linger**? What is worth being hysterical over and not letting go? Nothing! Slowly, by taking it easy, you will gradually let go. We must practice! So, we must listen to the sutra teachings continuously and let go continuously, because listening to the sutra teachings helps us see through, and seeing through helps us let go; they compliment each other.

Thanks everyone for learning with us! Namo Amitabha!

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All Will Dwell on the Firm Determination for Ultimate Enlightenment

Let us review the verse of 28 to 31 Vows. "When I become a Buddha, there will be no unwholesome names in my land. All beings who are born into my land will have the same mind, dwelling on **the firm determination for ultimate enlightenment** (**niyata-rāṣi*). They will eternally depart from afflictions and have a **pure and** cool mind. The bliss they receive is like that of bhikṣus who have "extinguished all defilements" (**Skt. niyata-rāṣi or samyaktva-niyata, referring to extinction of defilements, a state of no more affliction arises*). If they give rise to greedy thoughts concerning their bodies, I will not procure Anuttara-Samyak-Sambodhi."

The 29th Vow: All will dwell on the full determination for ultimate enlightenment. No matter which path we were from and how much defilements and karma we had, as long as being escorted by Amitabha, all will "have the same mind and dwell on the firm determination for attaining Buddhahood. This firm determination refers to non-retrogression. It also refers to the attainment of avaivartika. Avaivartika is Sanskrit. It is translated into Chinese as the Three Levels of Non-Retrogression.