

47th & 48th Vows: Obtaining Kṣānti and Attaining the Position of Non-Retrogression

The verse of the 47th and 48th Vows states, "They will be pure, blissful, and dwell in the Dharma of Equality. In cultivating bodhisattva-conduct, they will be replete with the roots of all virtues. If they are unable to instantly obtain the first, second, and third stages of kṣānti, as well as realize the state of non-retrogression. I will not procure Anuttara-Samyak-Sambodhi."

How can a heart be pure? A heart can be pure only when there is no intermixed contamination, defilements, or worry. Amidst this purity, there must be wisdom. What is this wisdom? Perceiving thoroughly the essence of all dharmas (*phenomena).

It is like Avalokitesvara Bodhisattva demonstrating for us in *The Heart Sutra*, "Avalokitesvara Bodhisattva, when practicing deep prajna-paramita (*supra-world wisdom, allowing one to transcend the sea of birth-death), perceives that all five skandhas are empty, thus being liberated from all suffering and tribulations."

The Five Skandhas Are Empty

The five skandhas are form (*rūpa), feeling (vedanā), perception (*samjñā), mental formation (*samskāra), and consciousness(*vijñāna). Not only the form of our physical body, but the spirit of feeling, perception, mental formation, and consciousness are all composed of the five skandhas.

Feeling is a sensation. Perception is our thinking, our thoughts. Mental formation is the phenomena that are arising and ceasing with our every thought; it implies that our thoughts are arising and ceasing at all times. Therefore, our entire material world is also constantly arising and ceasing in accord with our every thought, forming our metabolism and making our physical body age continuously. Birth, aging, sickness, and death cannot be stopped, this is called "mental formation."

What is consciousness? Consciousness refers to ālayavijñāna—the eighth consciousness, which is for collecting the seeds. What we have done, including all of our thinking and behaviors, will all leave impressions on us and become seeds in our ālayavijñāna. This is called consciousness.

These five skandhas of form, feeling, perception, mental formation, and consciousness are all illusive. Nothing is a substantial existence. In other words, mortals regard the five skandhas as real. They regard their physical body as real and thus have cravings and are attached to it. They also regard feelings, perception, mental formation, and consciousness as real, so they would be very vexed when having leg pain and would be very distressed when having contradictions with their spouses.

We have many wandering thoughts which are constantly arising and ceasing. We are unable to stop them. We regard them as real and thus are affected by them. When we know that the five skandhas are all empty, we will then not keep them in our minds, they will thus not affect and impede us. We will be liberated from all sufferings and tribulations. Suffering is agony, while tribulations are dilemmas or calamities. How can we liberate our sufferings and transcend our calamities? All we need to do is to regard the five skandhas as empty. We must let go of these five skandhas.

The Ultimate Bliss of Dharma-Joy

Where do our sufferings come from? We do not let go and regard them as real. Furthermore, we strive to seek connections in the realms of our encounters, we compete, scuffle, contradict, even have conflicts and fight with others, of course we will have tribulations. Let go, we will be free from suffering. However it requires us to completely illuminate with prajna wisdom, we can then enter this realm. This state of mind can then be considered genuinely pure. What arises from a pure mind must be joy; we will be full of Dharma-joy.

To be without suffering and distress is joy. What kind of joy is this? It is “ultimate bliss.” Ultimate bliss is not the kind of secular happiness that is opposite to suffering. Why? Because this kind of secular happiness is transient, it arises and ceases. For instance, you are hungry. You feel very distressed when hungry. Now, you eat a filling meal and are very happy. This happiness is opposite to suffering, it does not last. A few hours later, you will be hungry and feel suffering again. How could that kind of happiness be real happiness?

Moreover, that kind of happiness not only does not last but cannot be exceeded. If it is excessive, it turns into suffering. For example eating, when you are very hungry, you eat one bowl and are quite happy. You eat two bowls—still okay. You eat three bowls—almost cannot make it. Now, someone forces you with a stick to eat ten bowls. You’re doomed! This is the most suffering of life, isn't it? If eating is a happy thing, it should be that the more you eat, the happier you get. But why do you suffer when you eat excessively? This explains that this kind of happiness is not real happiness.

Real happiness does not change. What can be changed is not genuine. That kind of happiness is called “suffering of decay” (*Skt. [vipariṇāma-duḥkhatā](#)). All pursuits for our secular desires are like this—pursuing wealth, lust, fame, food, and sleep—the more you pursue, the more suffering you get. That is not true happiness. The ultimate bliss mentioned here is real. “They endure none of the sufferings but enjoy all bliss.” Why? Because they truly perceive that all five skandhas are illusive.

Being able to let go of everything due to completely understanding the thusness of all dharmas, the bodhisattvas of other worlds thus obtain purity and bliss. This bliss is the bliss of Sukhāvātī. They do not give rise to even one thought, only enjoying the peerless bliss of purity and quietude. This kind of great bliss from dhyana is the wondrous bliss of nirvana. They can

obtain them all! What do they rely on to obtain this? They rely on “upon hearing the name.” Once “hearing the name,” they will obtain blessings, thus obtaining bliss.

Dwelling on the Dharma of Equality

The Diamond Sutra states, “All dharmas are equal, they are neither superior nor inferior.” This is Buddhas’ realm. All Buddhas have seen the truth of the universe, they know that all dharmas are indeed equal. Buddhas are equal to demons, good people are equal to bad people, male and female are also equal. They are different only in their manifestations, yet intrinsically they are all equal. From the perspective of nature, they all are manifestations of self-nature, so they are equal. “Dwell on the Dharma of Equality” signifies that you have truly given rise to wisdom and realized the *truth* of the universe and life; you have recognized that Buddha's words are correct. Indeed, “all dharmas are equal, they are neither superior nor inferior.”

Your heart has peacefully dwelled on this equal realm, this is called “dwell on the Dharma of Equality.” In other words, you have realized self-nature! You know that all phenomena arise from self-nature and are innately equal. You no longer have discrimination and attachment. In your heart, there is neither good nor bad, neither kind nor evil, neither superior nor inferior. All are equal!

Having dwelled on Equality yourself, you must teach all beings to also dwell on Equality. All beings may not have this kind of root, namely spiritual capacity (*Skt. *indriya*), how do you teach them? We pray that Buddha blesses them! How? We also let them “hear the name,” teaching and guiding them with the Pure Land Method by telling them Amitabha's Forty Eight Great Vows.

If they really understand the merits of the Forty Eight Great Vows and the name of Amitabha, they will also “dwell on the Dharma of Equality.” This is the most genuine benefit stated in *The Infinite Life Sutra*, “Bestow the benefit of thusness to all beings.” You will practice bodhisattva-conduct after dwelling on the Dharma of Equality! This is self-awakening and awakening others by simply using one method: the Pure Land Method.

The Pure Land Method can obtain Buddha's blessing the most, its effect is most remarkable and most swift. So these bodhisattvas will surely and specifically use the Pure Land Method to edify all beings.

Replete With the Roots of All Virtues

The roots of all virtues refer to the roots of all merits. What are the roots of all merits? It is the name Amitabha, which represents the virtues of self-nature. This name Amitabha consummately assimilates the merits of self-nature. And the merits of all Buddhas in ten

directions are also integrated into this name Amitabha. This is what Mañjuśrī Bodhisattva told us. So when we recite Amitabha, we have consummately assimilated the merits of all Buddhas in ten directions. On that account, isn't this name Amitabha the root of all merits? When you can continuously recite Amitabha, aren't you "replete with the roots of all virtues?"

All these merits come from "upon hearing the name." If we do not hear the merits of Amitabha, how could we possibly recite Amitabha conscientiously? Even if we, just like the Pot Fixer whom we previously mentioned, have never heard sutra teachings during this life yet can recite Amitabha conscientiously, it is due to having learned quite well in past lives. So in this life reciting Amitabha is enough for you to make up for the little insufficiency.

However, we have not yet learned enough. Why? Because we still have doubts. Since we have doubts and have not yet let go, we must learn by listening to sutra teachings. When we really understand it, we will also let go of everything. Once we let go of everything, we no longer need to listen to sutra teachings. This name Amitabha is enough. This is "replete with the roots of all virtues." Look! Even bodhisattvas must start from "hearing the name," they can then, at last, "be replete with the roots of all virtues" and let go of even the sutras. We mortals of course need to even learn more of sutra teachings until we have no more doubts!

Learn Until You Have No More Questions

Some practitioners came to ask me, "Shifu ([*referring to Master Chin Kung here, fatherly teacher](#)) said that at the time of rebirth, one name Amitabha is enough. Can I now recite Amitabha only?" I said, "You cannot." They asked, "Why?" I said, "Because you still come to ask me, it indicates that you still have doubts. When you still have doubts in your heart, it proves that you have not yet 'heard the name' enough, so that your faith is not determined and your aspiration is not imperative enough either."

If you have genuine faith and imperative aspiration, would you still come to ask me? No! You would close the door and recite conscientiously at home. You still walk around looking for a consultant, it indicates that you have not learned enough. That's why I am persuading you to "hear the name" by listening to sutra teachings. According to our Shifu Master Chin Kung, when you are genuinely clear about the sutra, you will have no more questions. If you still have questions, it shows that you are not conscientious and honest. In fact, I am not talking about you. I was originally less honest than you are. I liked asking questions the most. All day long I followed Shifu and asked questions for many years. Finally I had no more questions. Learning sutra teachings, you must learn until you have no more questions, you can then possibly be conscientious and honest.

In the past, Shifu was propagating Dharma in America. One time, the audience wanted to ask many questions after the class was finished, but there was not enough time. Shifu then said, "Although you have many questions, I know them all. They can be concluded as delusion,

discrimination, and attachment. Isn't it? If you do not have delusion, discrimination, and attachment, where would your questions come from?" Shifu is very humorous.

I also answer your questions with this name, "Namo Amitabha." Once you can recite this name, you will have no more questions. Your delusion, discrimination, and attachment will be dispelled. However, this is in theory, but in reality you will still have questions. What can you do? You still need to ask. Buddhism can withstand your inquiry. You must comprehend your questions until they are crystal clear. One day you will have no more questions. When you are genuinely honest to recite this name Amitabha all the way, you will then "be replete with the roots of all virtues."

The basis is "upon hearing the name," which refers to that you truly comprehend the doctrine and give rise to genuine faith and imperative aspiration. There will be that day as long as you conscientiously listen to sutra teachings and practice reciting Amitabha in the meantime.

Thanks everyone for learning with us. Namo Amitabha!