

In One Lifetime:
Pure Land Buddhism



In One Lifetime: Pure Land Buddhism

Shi Wuling

Amitabha Publications
Chicago

Venerable Wuling is an American Buddhist nun of the Pure Land school of Mahayana Buddhism. More of her writing is available on her blog at www.abuddhistperspective.org.

Amitabha Publications, Chicago, 60532
© 2007 by Amitabha Publications
Published 2006

No part of this book may be altered without permission from the publisher. Reprinting is allowed for non-profit use.
For the latest edition, contact www.amitabha-publications.org.

“The Ten-Recitation Method” is based on talks by
Venerable Master Chin Kung
Chapters 1, 3, and 4 contain excerpts from
Awaken to the Buddha Within by Venerable Wuling

10 09 08 07 2 3 4 5
ISBN: 978-1-59975-357-7
Library of Congress Control Number: 2006927171

Printed by:
The Amitabha Buddhist Library in Chicago
2753-2755 W. Maple Avenue, Lisle, IL 60532, U.S.A.
Tel: (630) 428-9941 Fax: (630) 428-9961
www.amitabhalibrary.org

For more teachings and gifts of the Dharma, please visit us at
www.amitabha-publications.org.

Contents

| | |
|---------------------------------|-----|
| Pure Land Buddhism | 1 |
| Chanting | 6 |
| Cultivation | 8 |
| The Five Guidelines | 28 |
| Dharma Materials | 43 |
| Visiting a Buddhist Center | 44 |
| Chanting Session | 46 |
| The Amitabha Sutra | 50 |
| Questions and Responses | 70 |
| Supportive Buddha-name Chanting | 85 |
| Living Will | 92 |
| Thoughts from Master Yin Guang | 97 |
| Closing Thoughts | 101 |
| Ways to Reach Us | 103 |

Pure Land Buddhism

Once, the Buddha was asked if he was a god. The Buddha replied that no, he was not a god. Then was he an angel? No. A spirit? No. Then what was he? The Buddha replied that he was awakened. Since the Buddha, by his own assertion, is not a god, we do not worship him. We respect and are grateful to him for teaching us many different methods to help us find the way to be liberated from the cycle of birth, death, and rebirth, and like him, to become perfectly enlightened.

One of the methods the Buddha taught is Pure Land Buddhism. Though still in its formative years in the West, Pure Land Buddhism is widely practiced in Asia and its roots extend all the way to ancient India.

We generally think in terms of only one Buddha: Sakyamuni, who lived about 2500 years ago. But, since any sentient being can awaken and innumerable numbers have, there are innumerable Buddhas. Sakyamuni Buddha, after his enlightenment, explained that he saw not only his past lifetimes but also how the future would unfold.

Sakyamuni saw people in our time having more

afflictions, worries, and wandering thoughts. Our deep-seated bad habits having become even more entrenched over thousands of lifetimes would make liberating ourselves solely by our own efforts almost impossible. He knew that to end one's problems and attain lasting happiness many people would need the help of another Buddha: Amitabha, the Buddha of Infinite Light and Infinite Life.

Almost all of the teachings by Sakyamuni were the result of his being asked a question. In a departure from the norm, and knowing when the time was right, Sakyamuni initiated the teaching that introduced Amitabha and his pure land. This spontaneous teaching by Sakyamuni is what makes this teaching so special.

In this teaching, Sakyamuni recounted how the bodhisattva Dharmakara, after witnessing the suffering of sentient beings, spent five eons (an incredibly long period of time) studying all the Buddha lands. Dharmakara then made forty-eight vows, the fulfillment of which would create the Western Pure Land of Ultimate Bliss. He declared that he would not attain Buddhahood unless his vows for a perfect pure land, where all beings would advance along the Buddhist

path and never again fall back on into samsara, were accomplished. Once these vows were accomplished, Dharmakara Bodhisattva became Amitabha Buddha. He is now speaking the Dharma in his pure land and helping all who are truly sincere in their vows to be reborn there.

With help from Amitabha, we do not have to rely solely on ourselves to attain enlightenment as we would with other methods. In Pure Land Buddhism, we rely on the compassionate Buddhas and bodhisattvas to help us. Thus, reliance on self and on another are combined as we request by way of our mindful chanting that Amitabha Buddha, through the strength of his vows, help us to be reborn in his Pure Land as we breathe our last breath in our present body.

Amitabha also vowed that once we attain this rebirth, we will always progress in our practice and learning. We will be able to continue our practice in his Pure Land, or, when we choose, return to this and other worlds to help others, without being affected by unfavorable environments or our former bad habits. If we wish, we will be able to do this before we attain supreme enlightenment.

Due to Amitabha Buddha's merits and virtues, and the goodness of all the beings there, his Pure Land has innumerable wonders and advantages, all of which arise from the great vows, deeds, and purity of all the beings there. Through his vows, Amitabha helps all beings create the causes to plant the roots of goodness. With his deeds, he creates the conditions for beings to accumulate merits. With his purity, he has created a perfect land—one that is free from anger, and intolerance. It is a land of peace, serenity, and equality. In comparison, our world is one of delusion and suffering, filled with worry

For countless people, Pure Land practice is the most suitable for several reasons. First, it is relatively easy to practice in almost any environment: alone, with other practitioners, or even amid the hustle and bustle of everyday life. Second, there are no difficult entry-level criteria. Even if one's abilities and knowledge are modest, with belief, vows, and practice, we will be reborn in the Pure Land.

Belief means that we need to believe in the Buddhas and their teachings, and in causality. We need to believe in ourselves and that we have the same true nature as the Buddha. We need to believe that by

living a moral life and being mindful of Amitabha Buddha we will be born into the Western Pure Land and become a Buddha in one lifetime.

And third, due to the vows of Amitabha, achievement through this method can be attained more quickly and more easily than with other practices. We can understand this better through an analogy. We come to a river that we wish to cross. We can swim across but our baggage is very heavy and the water is treacherously deep.

Alternatively, we can get on a boat that will quickly and safely take us and our baggage to the other shore. Symbolically, the “other shore” is the achievement of enlightenment. The baggage we carry is our deep-seated bad habits and negative karmas accumulated over uncountable lifetimes, and the boat is Amitabha Buddha's compassionate will. The ticket to board the boat is belief, the sincere vow to be reborn in the Pure Land, and practice, which includes leading a moral life and mindfully chanting “Amitufo.”

Chanting

The simplest way to practice Pure Land is by chanting “Amitufo,” which is Amitabha Buddha in Chinese. It does not matter whether we chant in Chinese or any other language as long as we do it properly. When we chant, the sound of “Amitufo” arises in our minds. And as we utter “Amitufo,” our minds concentrate on and embrace that sound. While chanting, do so sincerely and continuously.

As one keeps chanting and the mind focuses on the sound of “Amitufo,” errant thoughts are replaced with pure thoughts. In this way, we also create less negative karma. After Amitabha has been in our mind continuously for a long time, our true nature—our Buddha-nature—will gradually be uncovered.

It is similar to a child remembering a dearly loved one: a mother, father, or someone equally close. The dearly loved one is always with him, always in his heart. Likewise, he is always in the dearly loved one's heart—and never forgotten. In a similar way, Amitabha is always thinking of us, waiting for us to reach out to him so that he may respond to us.

Amitabha Buddha is the wise and compassionate

teacher who understands everything, and who is always thinking of us, lifetime after lifetime after lifetime. We are the students who are trying to learn and to practice. Just as a good teacher listens to the calls for help from a student looking for the right answers, if we have unwavering belief, vow to be reborn in the Pure Land, and sincerely practice, Amitabha will respond. All we have to do is chant his name mindfully.

When we chant to the point of single-mindedness with the sole thought of “Amitufo,” we successfully form a connection with him—in fact, we become one with him. In that instant we are in the Pure Land—far to the west and deep within us.

As we breathe our last breath in this world, if we can form this connection, form this oneness with “Amitufo,” we will attain our next rebirth in the Western Pure Land and leave suffering behind. And once there, we will have all the time we need to continue our practice and learning, for we will be in the company of Amitabha Buddha and all the bodhisattvas. They will help us learn all the ways to wisely and compassionately help other beings.

Cultivation

Our practice of chanting “Amituofo” can be done anywhere anytime. But if we wish to have a special place for practice in our home, we first need to decide where we would like it to be. A separate room is ideal, but when this is not possible a quiet and comfortable spot will do just as well. It is also advisable to choose a set time in the day, perhaps early in the morning when the mind is still relatively calm or at night as you are winding down from a long day and wish to let go of anything that is troubling you.

When setting up your *gongzhou* (the table where you place the Buddha image, incense, and other practice aids), place only objects that relate to your practice on it, not everyday objects. Apart from creating a respectful atmosphere, this will be beneficial to your concentration. You can use a bookshelf if space is limited; however, it is best to not place objects other than Dharma materials or books above this shelf. If the *gongzhou* needs to be placed in your bedroom, do not place it at the foot but rather to the side of the bed.

A simple arrangement would be to place a statue or

picture of Amitabha Buddha alone or accompanied by two bodhisattvas on the gongzhou with a clean container of water in front of Amitabha. Looking at the image of Amitabha, you would place Avalokitesvara Bodhisattva on the right side and Mahasthamaprapta Bodhisattva on the left side. If you have difficulty in obtaining an image, you can contact one of the societies listed at the back of this book to request a picture. If it is not possible to obtain a statue or other images, you may simply write “Amitabha Buddha” on a piece of paper and place it behind the container of water.

If you are in a situation where even this is not possible, just focus quietly on your practice. Motivation is what is important. A sincere wish to chant, to improve oneself, and to help others, is the most important requirement for practice.

Symbolism and Use

The image of the Buddha symbolizes our true nature, the same nature as that of all Buddhas. The images of the bodhisattvas symbolize understanding and practice. Mahasthamaprapta, also known as Great Power

Arrived Bodhisattva, symbolizes wisdom and Avalokitesvara, also known as Great Compassion Bodhisattva, symbolizes compassion. Wisdom and compassion are complementary and need to be used together.

If using a statue you can place it on a stand or box to elevate it above the other objects. The statue and bodhisattva images are placed at the back of the gongzhou to form the focal point.

Water represents purity and stillness. Our minds need to be as pure as water, void of greed, anger, and ignorance, and as calm. This will enable us to interact with others and situations with a serene and nondiscriminatory mind, which viewing everything equally, reflects everything clearly but non-judgmentally, like a mirror.

When setting up your gongzhou, use a new cup or glass for the water. Try to use a clear glass container, as seeing the water will remind you of what it symbolizes. Place the container in the center of the gongzhou and change the water regularly. The traditional time to change the water is in the morning. If this does not fit into your morning routine, you can instead change the water when you do your daily

chanting.

Incense symbolizes self-discipline and training which will awaken our wisdom and compassion. When lit, the incense is transformed from something hard and unyielding into the fragrance of the Dharma, the truth that teaches us how to end suffering and thus find lasting happiness. Place the incense holder in front of the water.

Flowers represent causality. Our every thought, word, and deed are causes that will bear results. If we wish to have good results we must first plant the seed to create the cause. Also, flowers can serve to remind us of impermanence for as beautiful as flowers are, their beauty is short-lived. Nothing lasts forever. Everything is impermanent.

Flowers may be placed at the foot of the Buddha image or to the side. A potted plant or silk flowers can be used instead of cut flowers. Change them when they are no longer suitable for the gongzhou.

Candles symbolize wisdom and brightness illuminating the darkness of ignorance, just as a single lit candle can illuminate a room that has been dark for thousands of years. The candle also represents the act of giving as it gives of itself so that others may see.

A pair of candles may be placed on both sides of the gongzhou arrangement. For safety, you may use lamps instead of candles. Also, there are small battery-operated candles that serve as a safe, yet fitting, alternative to candles.

Forms of Practice

To begin our practice, we put our hands together, palm to palm in front of our heart. Fingers are also placed together without any space between them. Eyes are focused on the tips of the middle fingers. Elbows are slightly bent. The head is tilted slightly down. This movement is used to express respect and is called *hezang* in Chinese. Besides being used to symbolize the mind without wandering thoughts, it is also used to express the oneness of the true nature.

It is traditional to begin practice with a simple ceremony that includes bowing to the Buddha. Bowing, also called prostrating, is our way of showing respect and can serve to purify the three karmas of body, speech, and mind when it is combined with chanting. Since this practice can be difficult physically for people who are unaccustomed to the

movements, it is acceptable to do a standing half bow instead of a full bow to the floor.

When ready to begin a practice session, do a half bow, three full bows, and a half bow. Both forms will be explained in detail in following sections. With this bowing, we pay respect to the Buddha and mentally prepare to begin our chanting. Having done this, we may next light an incense stick if conditions allow, and then take up our position.

Sitting

Assume a comfortable position on a meditation cushion or stool, or on a chair. Use a cushion, either on the floor or your chair, that is slanted so the back is slightly higher than the front of the cushion. This will incline your pelvis forward and provide better support. When sitting on the floor with a cushion, you may do so in a full or partial lotus position, or you may cross your legs. If this position is painful, it may be more comfortable to use a meditation stool or higher cushion. Sitting on the stool and placing one's legs under it in a simulated kneeling position is the usual position. If sitting on a chair, place both the soles of

both feet on the floor about a foot apart.

To sit in a lotus position, sit on the cushion and try to place the top of your left foot on your right thigh. Next, place your right foot on your left thigh to form a stable seat. The back and shoulders should be erect but relaxed. If this is too difficult, as it is for many people, try the half lotus position, in which you raise only one foot onto a thigh, and rest the other under the opposite thigh. Or sit cross-legged. Please remember that it is not necessary to force yourself to sit in an unfamiliar position that is too physically demanding.

Try to determine whether your discomfort is simply the result of sitting still in a different position from what you are used to, or due to taking up a position that is just too difficult or painful. It is more important to focus on subduing our pointless, wandering thoughts than on subduing bodies that are not used to sitting in unfamiliar ways.

Hold your hands on your lap with the back of the right hand resting on the palm of the left hand, and with thumb tips slightly raised and lightly touching. Eyes may be lightly closed or slightly open. If you feel drowsy when your eyes are closed, open them slightly.

Posture is very important, so sit upright comfortably without slumping or leaning forward. Hold the head at a slight downward tilt with the chin pulled in just a little. In this position, begin chanting “Amitufo” aloud or silently.

Breathe in through the nose, pulling the air down into the deepest part of the lungs while distending the diaphragm and then slowly breathe out through the nose. Breathing should be natural. Try to use your diaphragm to pull the air deeper into your lungs instead of breathing shallowly. In silent chanting, the tip of the tongue lightly touches the back of the upper teeth, and teeth and lips are held as usual. Shoulders are level and elbows are held slightly away from your sides.

If you are not yet accustomed to such practice and experience discomfort such as leg cramps, slowly move your legs into a position in which you are more comfortable. It is best to keep initial sessions short: ten to fifteen minutes. Sessions may be gradually lengthened as you become more used to the practice. It is better to do a short period of chanting than not do it at all. You may use walking or bowing to calm both mind and body before you begin your sitting.

Continue your chanting as you vary the physical forms of practice.

Walking

We can practice walking indoors or outdoors. This practice is excellent for mindfulness as well as for calming down both mind and body. We are usually so wrapped up in rushing from one place to another that before we can sit quietly we need to gently slow ourselves down. Thus, it is often helpful to begin a longer chanting session with walking because this helps to make the transition from hurried everyday activities to our practice.

Unlike our usual walking as a means to get from one place to another, often quickly and without any real sense of where we are, our practice of walking while chanting is slow and deliberate. While we do not become absorbed in our surroundings, we do remain aware of where we are and what is happening around us. Ideally, we remain alert but are not distracted by activities around us.

If your area for walking is large enough, you can walk in a circle. While walking slowly, be aware of

lifting and placing your feet upon the floor or the earth. Instead of the usual hurried impact on the surface we are walking on, the foot should gently touch it. Keep body movements smooth and lithe, as with tai chi movements. During this practice, hands are held at slightly lower than waist level in front of us, with the back of the right hand resting on the palm of the left and with our thumb tips lightly touching. Walk clockwise, as this has been the custom since the time of the Buddha.

There are two basic forms of our walking. In the faster form, lift your right foot off the floor, or ground, and move it forward and place it on the floor as you chant “A” (pronounced as “ah”). Then repeat the movement with your left foot as you chant “mi” (pronounced as “me”). Step again on your right foot as you chant “tuo” (pronounced as “tuaw”) and then on the left foot on “fo” (pronounced as “faw”). In the slower method, step on your right foot as you chant “A” and slowly shift your weight from your heel to your toes as you chant “mi.” Then step on your left foot on “tuo” and slowly shift your weight from your heel to your toes as you chant “fo.”

In both forms, all movements should be deliberate

and careful. While we usually step on the right foot first people at other centers might step on the left, so if you attend different centers you will need to see how they do their walking meditation.

During the walking, our chanting may be done aloud or silently to ourselves. Whether aloud or silent, listen to and focus on the sound of your chanting. Walking may be used to break up longer periods of sitting or as the sole form of practice. During retreats or regular chanting sessions, some centers use walking meditation more often since it effectively counters the drowsiness and stiffness that can arise from prolonged periods of sitting.

We can also do our walking in a relatively smaller flat path area of about twenty yards or so. When you reach the end of the walking area, pause and then turn slowly to your right. Stand for a few seconds and then resume walking. Whether walking on the path, pausing, or standing still for a moment, remain focused on your chanting.

Prostrating

We bow not to worship but to pay our respects to the

Buddha for teaching us, to recognize the Buddha-nature that is in him and in all beings, and to practice humility by touching the floor with our head.

If we are focused and sincere in what we are doing, we will be cleansing the three karmas of body, speech, and mind. For example, as we bow, our body will be moving as we chant, and with each bow, we will purify some of our negative karma we had created through our former actions. As we think “Amitufo,” we will purify some of our evil karma created by our past thoughts. As we chant “Amitufo,” we will purify some of our past harmful speech. In our chanting, we pronounce each syllable clearly and distinctly so that we hear the chant whether it is voiced or silent. Regardless of whether we chant when walking, sitting, or bowing, our focusing on the Buddha’s name will decrease our everyday worries. Eventually, they will be eliminated.

To begin bowing, stand with your feet pointing slightly outward in a “V” and your heels a few inches apart. Place your hands in the hezang position, look down at the tips of your middle fingers, and slightly tilt your head down. Keeping your neck straight, slowly bend forward until you have bent over almost forty

degrees. Then, bend at the knees and, while holding your left hand in the same position at chest level, move your right hand toward the floor so that it will support you as your bending knees complete lowering you to the ground.

When your right hand touches the ground bring the left hand to the ground as well, but about six inches ahead of the right. With this support of both hands on the ground, continue bending your knees to the ground until your knees are on the floor. Your right hand should be just in front and slightly outside the edge of the right knee, and the left hand still ahead of the right. For those with problems in the wrist or joints, or who feel unsteady due to physical conditions you may place both hands down at the same time to form a better support.

Next, flex your feet so that the tops of your feet are resting on the floor and your toes are almost touching each other. Your lower legs and feet will now be resting on the floor and your buttocks will be resting on your legs.

Move your right hand to a position level with your left and angle your hands towards each other so your lower arms and hands form an inverted “V” without

the hands touching one another and with your palms down. Continue lowering your upper body until your forehead touches the floor. At this point, slowly and supplely make a loose fist with each hand and then turn your hands over so they are palms up with fingers very gently curled. Position your hands as if offering to hold the Buddha with your hands. This is the final position in the full bow. Your forehead, forearms, knees, lower legs, and feet will now be resting on the floor. Keep your slightly curved back parallel to the floor. Do not push your stomach down thereby pulling the middle of your backbone down; keep the back gently curved.

To raise yourself, just repeat the entire bow in reverse order. Slowly turn the hands so they are palms down. Then pull your right hand towards your body a foot or so and this will help to straighten and raise your trunk. If needed, pull your left hand towards your body until it is more level with your right hand then using both hands push yourself up. Change the position of your feet so your toes are on the ground and your feet are ready to support you as you rise. Continue rising and straightening up until you are again standing upright with palms together at chest

level.

Begin with only a few bows, bowing slowly and gently while being mindful of your movements, and gradually increase the number you do. If possible, do this practice while a chanting machine or tape is playing. You may remain in the full bow position for several seconds until you begin to rise.

Dedication of Merits

Upon completion of our chanting, we formally dedicate our merits to being born into the Pure Land by reciting the following:

May the merits and virtues accrued from this work
adorn the Buddha's Pure Land,
repay the Four Kindnesses above,
and relieve the sufferings of those
in the Three Paths below.

May those who see or hear of this,
bring forth the heart
of understanding and compassion and,
at the end of this life,

be born together in the Land of Ultimate Bliss.

The Four Kindnesses are the Three Jewels (the Buddha, the Dharma, and the Sangha), parents, teachers, and all beings. At the initial level of understanding, the “Three Paths below” are those of animals, hungry ghosts, and hell dwellers. In the cycle of rebirth, these three are below those of humans, asuras, and heavenly beings.

But at a higher level of understanding, the Three Paths can be viewed as the Realm of Desire (our world), the Realm of Form (where the lesser deities dwell), and the Realm of Formlessness (where the higher deities dwell). Until one transcends the cycle of rebirth, one is still bound to rebirth within the hell, hungry ghost, animal, human, asura, and heavenly paths. Yes, even for those in the heavenly realms, where existence is truly wonderful, such existence will one day end and suffering will return.

Nianju

Another method for practice is to use *nianju*, or mala. These are worn around the wrist. In this method, we

recite “Amitufo” once as we gently move each bead towards us with our thumb. As we practice, our thoughts will initially be on the beads, but gradually we will be able to focus more firmly on our chanting. This method is particularly helpful during the day when we can find some time to chant, especially when we wish to return to the sense of serenity that our chanting brings, or when we encounter stressful situations, and so on.

Nianju come in single wrist lengths of varying numbers of beads or a longer length of 108 beads. This longer nianju will usually have three smaller beads evenly spaced along the string, and one “mother” bead. The three smaller beads, usually of a different color, symbolize the following: the Buddha, who represents awakening; the Dharma, which represents proper views and understanding; and the Sangha, which represents harmony and purity of mind.

Nianju beads are often made from the seeds, wood, or root of a Bodhi tree, or from other natural materials like gemstones or different types of wood. Natural materials like wood and seeds darken and develop a beautiful luster as we practice.

If the mother bead of your nianju has a Buddha

image, do not use it for your chanting. Stop at the bead before it and reverse direction so you are moving in the opposite direction. In the Pure Land tradition, most nianju do not have a Buddha image, so we continue our chanting and pass the mother bead in the same manner as the other beads.

Audio Aids

Many practitioners like to use a chanting machine, which is a small plastic box that contains a computer chip. The chip continuously plays chanting music and allows us to always have the chanting with us. Although we may not consciously focus on the sound of the chanting, the machine serves as an excellent aid to keep the sound at least on a lower level of awareness, ready to rise to our consciousness whenever we wish.

CDs and audio tapes are a very good alternative and the contents can be transferred easily to MP3 players. CDs, tapes, or chanting machines may be requested from Amitabha Buddhist societies and Pure Land Learning Centers.

Ten-recitation Method

This simple, convenient, and effective way to practice Buddha name chanting is especially suitable for those who find that they have little time for cultivation. The chanting helps us to be mindful of Amitabha Buddha. It brings us joy.

We begin when we wake up. Sit up straight and clearly chant “Amituofo” ten times with a calm and focused mind, aloud or silently. We repeat this eight more times throughout the day. Each time we chant “Amituofo” ten times. This chanting can be done by following one of two programs. Please choose the one that is the most suitable for your circumstances.

One program is to chant upon waking up, before and after breakfast, before work, before and after lunch, before and after dinner, and before retiring. The other program is to chant upon waking up, before breakfast, before and after our morning’s work, before lunch, before and after our afternoon’s work, before dinner, and before retiring.

The key is regularity; disruption of this practice will reduce its effectiveness. When we recite consistently without interruption, we will soon feel an increase in

our wisdom, serenity, and purity of mind. Diligent practice of this method together with unwavering belief, vows, and living a moral life can ensure fulfillment of our wish to reach the Western Pure Land.

The Five Guidelines

The Five Guidelines form the foundation and are the way we progress in our practice. They are first, the Three Conditions; second, the Six Harmonies; third, the Threefold Learning; fourth, the Six Paramitas; and fifth, the Ten Great Vows. We begin our practice with the first guideline of the Three Conditions and gradually progress from there.

Master Chin Kung extracted these guidelines from the five Pure Land sutras, which consist of three sutras, two chapters from sutras, and one treatise. The Pure Land sutras and treatise are:

1. The *Infinite Life Sutra*
2. The *Amitabha Sutra*
3. The *Visualization Sutra*
4. “Samantabhadra Bodhisattva's Conduct and Vows” from the *Avatamsaka Sutra*
5. “The Perfect, Complete Realization of Mahasthamaprapta Bodhisattva” from the *Shurangama Sutra*
6. The *Rebirth Treatise*

The Three Conditions

The first of the Five Guidelines is the Three Conditions, which were related by the Buddha in the *Visualization Sutra*. He explained that the Three Conditions were the true causes of pure karma for all Buddhas of the past, present, and future.

In the *Amitabha Sutra*, the Buddha further explained that to be reborn in the Western Pure Land, we have to be "good men and good women." The standard for this is the Three Conditions; thus, they are a crucial part of our practice, an integral component of rebirth in the Pure Land. To achieve this rebirth, we need belief, vows, and practice—leading a moral life and chanting Amitufo mindfully.

The First Condition is:

1. Be filial to and provide for parents
2. Be respectful to and serve teachers
3. Be compassionate and not kill any living beings
4. Cultivate the Ten Virtuous Conducts.

Physically, we are to refrain from killing, stealing, and sexual misconduct. Verbally, we are to refrain from lying, harsh speech, divisive speech, and enticing speech. Mentally, we are

to refrain from giving rise to greed, anger, and ignorance.

The Second Condition is:

5. Take the Three Refuges
6. Abide by the precepts
7. Behave in a dignified, appropriate manner

The Third Condition is:

8. Generate the Bodhi mind
9. Believe deeply in causality
10. Study and chant the Mahayana sutras
11. Encourage others to advance on the path to enlightenment

The Six Harmonies

The Six Harmonies are guidelines that will enable us to get along in a sangha, which is the Buddhist community of four or more people, monastic or lay, who practice the teachings together. The Six Harmonies are harmony in:

1. Having the same viewpoints
2. Observing the same precepts
3. Living together as a group
4. Speaking without conflict

5. Experiencing the Dharma bliss

6. Sharing benefits

First is harmony in having the same viewpoints, which means establishing consensus in a group. The group members must uphold the same principles and methods that they are studying and practicing for harmonious group cultivation. If we want a stable society, everyone needs to get along with one another. Only harmony can gradually draw together and eventually minimize the differences in our opinions, ideas, and ways of life. Then equality can be achieved, and finally, happiness.

Second is harmony in observing the same precepts. When we live and practice together, we need to have rules, or else there will be disorder. The rules include the precepts set by the Buddha, which vary depending on whether it is a lay or a monastic sangha. The fundamental precepts are the five precepts for a lay sangha, and the monk or nun precepts for a monastic sangha. In addition to the Buddhist precepts, laws and local customs are also to be observed.

Third is harmony in living together as a group. The purpose of establishing a cultivation center is to help every participant in the group succeed in their

practice. Living together in a group, practitioners can support each other.

Fourth is harmony in speaking without conflict. By reducing, and ideally eliminating, disputes, people will be better able to focus on their cultivation. People who talk too much often create problems for themselves. Misunderstandings can arise as the listener takes to heart a careless remark of the speaker. Thus, a careless speaker unknowingly incurs many enmities, which give rise to future retaliation. This is why it is best to, "Talk less; chant the Buddha's name more." The less we speak, the fewer problems we will have. It is best that we speak only when necessary.

Fifth is harmony in experiencing the Dharma bliss. When we learn and practice a Dharma Door, the basic achievement that we should attain is happiness. If we feel unhappy in our practice, then we have encountered a serious problem. This problem lies not in the Buddha's teachings, but in the way we practice. We may either have done something that goes against the principles of the teachings or applied the principles incorrectly. Otherwise, the results would gradually become apparent as we lessen our suffering.

With each passing day, we would enjoy greater happiness and freedom. This shows that we are progressing in our practice. If we are not achieving this, we need to reflect, find our mistakes, and then correct them. We can then thus truly benefit from our practice.

Sixth is sharing benefits. In the sangha, everything is shared fairly and whenever possible, equally. In this way, everyone's basic needs will be met. Special needs are also to be considered. Understanding that everything in the sangha is an offering, nothing should be wasted. This will insure that future needs will also be met.

The Threefold Learning

The third of the Five Guidelines is the Threefold Learning. To counteract the problems of the people in our world and age, the Buddha taught:

1. Moral self-discipline
2. Meditative concentration
3. Innate wisdom

Moral discipline counteracts our habits for wrongdoing. Meditative concentration counteracts the tendency of our minds to wander and have scattered

thoughts. Wisdom counteracts ignorance, our wrong views and knowledge, and our lack of correct knowledge.

We begin with moral self-discipline, with training. On a basic level, we abstain from killing; from stealing; from sexual, or sensual, misconduct; from lying; and from the taking of intoxicants. On a broader basis, we behave in a moral and ethical way in everything we do.

By not killing, we will revere all life, and have compassion and respect for all sentient beings. By our very existence, we are taking lives. As we walk, we step on insects. To produce the food we eat and the water we drink, millions of other animal and microbiological lives are destroyed. We cannot stop eating or drinking water, but we can make certain we do not waste anything. Understanding our impact on others, we can use what we need, but no more than that.

Not killing also has a more subtle aspect: We should not kill the seeds of goodness in others or harm another emotionally. While our thoughts and actions can be damaging to others, it is our speech that all too easily commits this offense. Our careless, sarcastic, or angry words can deeply wound a child, a loved one, a

friend. We need to use our speech wisely and speak from the heart that wishes to help others.

By not stealing, we will respect the property of others and not take or use anything without permission of the owner. This seems simple enough, but this training also means that we do not take that book which is lying unclaimed in a restaurant. Neither do we keep the extra dollar that the clerk mistakenly gave to us nor do we take things from where we work for personal use.

By not committing sexual, or sensual, misconduct, we do not indulge in sensual pleasures, understanding that to do so not only increases our attachments and cravings, but our suffering as well.

By not lying, we speak truthfully, understanding the power that our words can have. We choose our words wisely realizing that great harm can result from ill-considered, untruthful speech.

By not taking intoxicants, we do not take substances that affect our ability to think and behave clearly at all times, and that harm our bodies. Remaining clear-headed helps us to not harm others or ourselves.

Next is meditative concentration. In meditative concentration, we focus our attention on whatever we choose. There are no distractions or worries, no doubts or drowsiness, no discriminations or attachments: We remain unaffected by our environment and maintain a calm, undisturbed mind. Initially, this state will bring joy and a sense of ease. Eventually, it will enable us to see things as they truly are.

In everyday life, we can concentrate on whatever we are doing. We will be aware of what is happening around us but we will not be distracted or disturbed by it. In daily life, we can practice meditative concentration in everything we do: whether we are working, watering the garden, or driving our car. We choose the object or activity of our attention and then remain focused on it.

We also strive to attain meditative concentration in our Buddhist practice. The practice of concentrating on “Amitufo” will help us to become one with perfect compassion, perfect happiness, and perfect peace. No longer will we feel that we need to attain perfection on our own as we realize that we are already one with that which is perfect.

Third is intuitive wisdom. Intuitive wisdom is not an intellectual pursuit nor is it a measure of academic intelligence. It is knowing and understanding, and it arises from within us when our minds are clear and calm.

The Six Paramitas

To interact successfully with others, the Buddha taught us the Six Paramitas, or Perfections. The fourth of the Five Guidelines, the paramitas are the practices of bodhisattvas. The Six Paramitas are:

1. Giving (*dana*)
2. Precept observation (*shila*)
3. Patience (*kshanti*)
4. Diligence (*vīrya*)
5. Meditative concentration (*dhyana*)
6. Wisdom (*prajna*)

The first paramita is giving. Giving counters greed, and ensures that in the future we will have ample resources to continue helping others. The underlying meaning of giving is letting go.

There are three major kinds of giving. The first is the giving of wealth, be it material resources or our

time and energy. When our giving becomes increasingly unconditional, we will begin to feel more liberated spiritually. The more we give away, the fewer possessions we have to worry about. Soon we will realize that we need very little to be truly content.

Second is the giving of teaching. By teaching others, we are helping them to learn how to rely more on themselves. We give material resources to try to solve immediate needs. But, if we want to solve needs that are more far-reaching, we teach. It is not necessary to have exceptional skills. Simply teach whatever we are good at and what others are not. The highest form of teaching is the Dharma, which can help people find lasting happiness and liberation.

And third is the giving of fearlessness. It is to remove the insecurities, worries, and fears of others, whether the “other” is human or non-human. This giving can be the sharing of a kind word, the giving of our strength and stability, or our understanding. When we relieve the worries and fears of others, and help them to feel more secure, they will be able to find peace and self-respect.

The second paramita is moral discipline, which counters worries and unhappiness, and enables us to

continue on our way to awakening. In a more literal sense, it means abiding by the precepts. In a broader sense, the second perfection means ethical behavior, as we follow the customs and laws of wherever we are. Initially, as we begin our practice of discipline, we can focus on refraining from harming others. Gradually, we begin to develop and increase our virtue. The ultimate form of this practice is to benefit others.

The third paramita is patience, which counters anger and hatred, and helps us to avoid arguments and to achieve our goals. We need patience in almost everything we do. If we are in school, we need patience to persevere in our study. At work, patience helps us to properly accomplish our tasks. At home, patience is the foundation for interacting well with family members. Patience enables us to get along more harmoniously with those around us. For ourselves, patience allows us to recognize our bad habits and to improve ourselves by changing those habits.

The fourth paramita is diligence, or enthusiastic effort. It is the joy that we bring to our practice and to all that is worthwhile in our lives. It is the true delight that arises from deep within us when we are doing

what is wholesome. It enables us to keep going when we feel tired or overwhelmed. It is refreshing and inspiring. Cultivating enthusiastic effort counters laziness, and brings joy to our lives as we feel a sense of accomplishment in finishing what we have started.

The fifth perfection is meditative concentration. Our practice and training in discipline and not harming others will reduce and gradually eliminate our harmful verbal and physical behaviors. Our minds will become calmer and less agitated. When our minds are thus settled, we will be better able to concentrate. Our concentration will initially reduce and, then, gradually eliminate our disturbing thoughts and emotional behavior. We will then gain meditative concentration, which will enable us to uncover our innate wisdom. Thus, discipline, meditative concentration, and wisdom work together, and are complementary.

The sixth paramita is wisdom. Wisdom counters ignorance, and enables us to know how best to help others and to improve ourselves, including our ability to get along well with others. This wisdom is not that which is gained through intense study and analysis of many diverse subjects. That would be seeking wisdom

from external sources. It is our innate, all-knowing wisdom.

If we begin to practice these six perfections in even just some small measure every day, starting with today, gradually, we will begin to look in the right direction, and gradually we will awaken to the perfect goodness, perfect contentment, and perfect joy that are already within our true nature, our Buddha-nature.

The Ten Great Vows

The fifth of the Five Guidelines is the Ten Great Vows of Samantabhadra in the *Avatamsaka Sutra*. These vows lead to the attainment of Buddhahood and are the practice of the highest-level bodhisattvas who have freed themselves from delusion. The Ten Great Vows are to:

1. Respect all Buddhas
2. Praise all Buddhas
3. Make offerings extensively
4. Repent karmic obstacles
5. Be joyful at other's meritorious deeds
6. Request the turning of the Dharma wheel

7. Request the Buddhas to remain in this world
8. Constantly follow the Buddha's teachings
9. Accord with all sentient beings
10. Dedicate all merits

Dharma Materials

Whether one is at home or traveling, do not place Dharma materials on the floor or the seat of a chair. If other space is temporarily unavailable, we may carefully place a book on the arm of a sofa or chair. Preferably, books should be closed and placed neatly on the higher shelves of a bookcase. When turning the pages, do so carefully and do not turn down the edge of the page to mark your place. If using a book for study, we may write in it if it is a commonly printed book and has no intrinsic value.

The books, images, and other Dharma materials are not to be taken into bathrooms. Also, if possible, please do not place them directly on your bed. When traveling, these books can be wrapped in a clean cloth and placed in your luggage. The books may also be placed on the cloth which is in turn placed on a bed.

When we are in the bathroom or are not properly dressed, chant silently. However, when cleaning or doing chores, we may chant aloud. Silent or voiced chanting brings the same result.

Visiting a Buddhist Center

There are some things that you need to be aware of when visiting a Buddhist center. The following is from a list of guidelines used at one of our societies. By following these and observing how others behave, you will be comfortable visiting any center. You can also ask the person in charge if you are unsure of what to do.

1. Refrain from any practices other than those of the centre.
2. Avoid talking loudly or unnecessarily so as not to disturb others.
3. Dress in a respectful manner and do not wear short skirts or shorts, see-through or tight clothing. Discreet, loose-fitting clothing is appropriate.
4. Do not use perfume and scented lotions; refrain from wearing anything that could make noise.
5. Greet others with hezang and a slight bow.
6. Remove your shoes before entering the cultivation hall. You will usually leave them on in other areas, like the dining hall. It is polite

to wear socks. Also try to remove your shoes in a place where you will not step on the ground prior to entering the hall.

7. Place your hands in the hezang position and bow to the Buddha after you step into the cultivation hall. If the room is not currently being used, you may move to a cushion and do a half bow, three full bows, and a half bow.
8. In many centers it is customary for men to sit on the right side and women to sit on the left. If you are unsure if this custom is followed at the center you are visiting, you might follow this arrangement to be polite.
9. When moving around the cultivation hall, try to avoid crossing in front of those who are chanting or prostrating.
10. When you greet (or write to) a monastic, it is polite to use the honorific of Venerable before their name. If you do not know their name, you may simply address them as Venerable. If you would like to use the Chinese, Shifu is Chinese for teacher and can also be used.

Chanting Session

First, place a container of clean water on the gongzhou if you have not already done so. Next, if you wish, light a stick of incense. If you have respiratory problems, there are some very nice smokeless varieties available. After lighting the incense, do not blow on the incense but fan it gently with your hand to put out the flame and allow it to burn slowly. Raise the lower tip of the incense to lightly touch your forehead with the incense pointed towards the Buddha and then place the incense in the holder.

In the following ceremony, which we follow sequentially, we first pay respects to Sakyamuni Buddha for teaching us about the unsatisfactory reality of our existence and of the happiness and liberation of the Pure Land. We then pay our respects to Amitabha Buddha for his compassionate vows to help all beings who request that help. Next, we begin chanting “Amitufo,” which is the main part of the session. Continue this chanting for the time you have set aside for your practice.

After chanting, we pay our respects to the bodhisattvas Avalokitesvara and Mahasthamaprapta for

their exemplary teachings of compassion and wisdom respectively, and then to all the bodhisattvas in the Pure Land for having progressed on the path of awakening. Next is the Verse of Repentance to express our deep regret for having harmed innumerable beings throughout our countless lifetimes. We conclude with the Dedication of Merit to pass on the goodness that has resulted from our chanting to help all beings end suffering and attain lasting happiness.

*Put palms together. Do one bow, three prostrations, one bow.
Place container of water in front of Amitabha Buddha image.
Light incense if desired.
Put palms together, bow once and say what is in quote marks.*

“Homage to our original teacher Sakyamuni Buddha”

(One bow)

(Repeat three times)

“Homage to Amitabha Buddha”

(One bow)

(Sitting or walking meditation while mindfully chanting)

“Amituofo”

(When finished, stand and put palms together)

“Homage to Avalokitesvara Bodhisattva”

(One bow)

“Homage to Mahasthamaprapta Bodhisattva”

(One bow)

“Homage to the great pure sea-vast assembly of
bodhisattvas.”

(One bow)

“All evil actions committed by me
since time immemorial,
stemming from greed, anger, and ignorance,
arising from body, speech, and mind,
I deeply repent having committed.”
(One bow)

“May the merits and virtues accrued from this work
adorn the Buddha’s Pure Land,
repay the Four Kindnesses above,
and relieve the sufferings of those
in the Three Paths below.

May those who see or hear of this
bring forth the Bodhi mind,
and at the end of this life,
be born together in the Land of Ultimate Bliss.”
(One bow, three prostrations, one bow)

A Buddhist Perspective: The Amitabha Sutra

The following entries are based on Ven. Master Chin Kung's 2003 Lecture Series on the *Amitabha Sutra* and appear at www.abuddhistperspective.org.

When Spoken Ill Of

If someone slanders us and we try to find a way to refute the slander, we will be asking for trouble. If we think of refuting the slander, we are not according with the Buddha's teachings. The Buddha did not teach us to refute slander. He taught us to ignore it. Let others do their slandering. We will behave as we usually do.

This is just like someone throwing a punch. If there is no resistance, the fist will fall on emptiness. If someone slanders us and we refute the slander, the situation will develop into a quarrel and then a fight. By remaining silent when being scolded and not striking back when being attacked, we concentrate our minds on cultivation and diligently practice the

Buddha's teachings.

Obviously this is very hard to do. Generally, we cannot tolerate being slandered. But our goal should be to endure what others cannot endure and practice what others cannot practice. In this way, we will progress on our Bodhi path to awakening.

When we reach critical moments in our cultivation, the obstacles we encounter will be grave. We should treat these obstacles as tests: I have progressed this far in my cultivation and need to take this test. With this thinking, we will realize that it is not a bad thing to encounter obstacles.

Beings Live Together in the Western Pure Land

The wondrousness of the Western Pure Land is inconceivable. Amitabha's Pure Land is a pure land where saints and ordinary beings live together, but it includes all Four Lands. When we go there, of course we go to the Land of Common Residence of Ordinary Beings and Saints because we carry residual karmas.

In all other Buddha-lands of the ten directions, the Four Lands are separate. Sakyamuni Buddha's Land

of Real Reward is in the Dharma Realm of the One Reality, and his Land of Expedient Liberation is in the four enlightened worlds. The lands are separate.

It is like schools in this world. Elementary schools, middle schools, and universities are separate. The Western Pure Land is unique. The students of elementary school, the students of middle school, the students of university, and post-graduate students all share the same classroom. This is unique. This is why it is called a teaching hard to believe.

When we go to the Western Pure Land, we are like elementary school students. But there are also university students, post-graduate students, and Ph. D. students in the same classroom. When we face difficulty, they will help us. An inconceivable world!

Therefore, attaining rebirth in the Land of Common Residence of Ordinary Beings and Saints, the first of the four lands, is the same as attaining rebirth in the Land of Expedient Liberation because arhats are our fellow practitioners.

It is also the same as attaining rebirth in the Land of Real Reward, the third of the four lands, because bodhisattvas are there with us.

It is also the same as attaining rebirth in the Land

of Eternally Quiescent Light, the highest of the four lands, because Buddhas are also there with us.

Beings in the Pure Land

In the Pure Land, we will be born inside our lotus flower, a pure conception. This is different from a fetus spending nine months in the womb. When one enters the womb, one is not pure. One's thoughts are not pure. Neither is the living environment. The womb is surrounded by the large and small intestines, by feces and urine. Therefore, the environment is not pure.

It is different when one is born in the Land of Ultimate Bliss. The lotus flower is pure. In addition, one is born through transformation. As soon as one is born, the body is tall and the appearance is magnificent. There are no young or old people there. Everybody has the same appearance. It is a world of equality. Therefore, the mind is at peace.

People in this world have different appearances and do not have an impartial mind. One who has good fortune or good looks can easily become arrogant. One

who has no good fortune or is unattractive often suffers from a sense of inferiority. These are common social phenomena.

In the Western Pure Land, everyone has the same appearance, the same physical conditions, the same living environment, and the same learning. Everyone is equal in everything there. Therefore, one will not have afflictions such as arrogance or a sense of inferiority.

Although one still has the seeds of afflictions and residual habits, there are no conditions that will cause these afflictions and residual habits to arise. This is why the Western Pure Land is incomparably wondrous and why it is praised by all Buddhas. These inconceivable conditions are because of the powers of the original vows and the merit of innumerable kalpas of cultivation of Amitabha Buddha.

Why It is So Hard to be Reborn in the Pure Land

It is most important that, in our cultivation, we correct our wrong mindset. If we are not happy with a person or a situation, this will obstruct our rebirth in the

Land of Ultimate Bliss, because our minds are not pure. This is why it is hard to attain rebirth in the Land of Ultimate Bliss and why Mr. Li Bingnan (one of Ven. Master Chin Kung's three teachers) said that only one or two out of 10,000 Pure Land practitioners succeed in attaining rebirth there.

Most practitioners only manage to suppress, not uproot, their afflictions. It entirely depends on their luck on their deathbed. If they cannot suppress their afflictions, which arise at the moment of their last breath, they will fall into the Three Evil Paths.

Therefore, we have to work hard to dissolve our dislike or hatred in daily life. We should not hold grudge any more. Instead, we should become more compassionate.

If someone holds a grudge against us, we should treat that person with compassion and gratitude.

Why gratitude? Because he or she helps us achieve the Paramita of Precept Observation and the Paramita of Patience. When we do not harbor the thought of taking revenge, this is keeping the precept of no killing. When we do not harbor anger, this is patience. He or she helps us achieve the Six Paramitas. Isn't this kindness?

Our afflictions and residual habits from uncountable kalpas are dissolved here and now. In this way, there will be no obstruction to our practice of nianfo and attainment of rebirth in the Land of Ultimate Bliss, and we will be able to move Amitabha Buddha to come and guide us on our deathbed.

If there is anything in this world that we cannot let go, it will become an obstacle to us.

Duality in All We See

As ordinary beings with far too many wanderings, thoughts, discriminations, and attachments, we view everything dualistically. We do not view all phenomena as one. When our true wisdom manifests, we will know that all phenomena are one, not two.

Take the lid of a mug for example. It is concave on one side but it is convex on the other side. If people do not understand this truth, then two people standing on different sides of the lid will quarrel over whether the lid is concave or convex. This is because they look at the lid from different sides. When they see both sides of the lid, they will realize that concave

is no different from convex. They are one, not two.

Bodhisattvas see both sides and are not attached to what they see. We see only one side, so we are attached to what we see. Eventually, when we see both sides, our wisdom will be perfect.

Buddhism teaches us to see every aspect of the Dharma Realms, space, worlds, all beings, all the mundane things that cloud our true nature. When we reach this state, everything will be harmonious.

Why We Study the Amitabha Sutra

The purpose of learning and practicing the *Amitabha Sutra* is to attain rebirth in the Western Pure Land—to be close to Amitabha and to study and practice there. What is wrong with studying and practicing in this world?

This world does not provide a good learning environment nor does it provide good teachers or fellow practitioners. The human life span is short, too short for learning. Amitabha Buddha provides us with the best learning environment. And if we want to go, we can. Sakyamuni Buddha told us that when we go

to that environment, all Buddhas will be our teachers, and people of supreme virtue will be our fellow practitioners.

In the Pure Land there is no cause for our greed, anger, and ignorance to arise. Why? Because whatever we need will appear before us, so we have no cause to become greedy. Everyone in the Western Pure Land is a good person. Nobody has any bad thoughts or bad intentions. Nobody uses harsh language. We have no cause to become angry. In other words, there is no condition for us to become angry.

What our senses touch is the Dharma, the sages' teachings. We will not be ignorant. In other words, we do not have to end or do anything about our greed, anger, and ignorance. When we live there long enough, our greed, anger, and ignorance will naturally be uprooted.

Precepts Transcend Time and Space

When we think of rules and laws we usually think of what are *worldly laws*. It is necessary to amend these laws periodically to suit the people and living

conditions of the time.

But precepts are supramundane rules, not worldly rules. If you want to transcend this world, the Six Paths, and the Ten Realms, you have to adhere to precepts.

Precepts are rules that all Buddhas and bodhisattvas adhere to in their cultivation over countless lifetimes. They are rules for transcending the Six Paths and the Ten Realms, not worldly rules for daily life. That is why they are unchangeable, the Five Precepts in particular. Do you think the Five Precepts can be changed? Is no killing wrong? How about no stealing, no sexual misconduct, no lying, and no intoxicants? They are unchangeable. They are major precepts by principle and transcend time and space.

The Tranquil, Constantly Observant Mind

Buddhas and the highest level bodhisattvas attain the patience that leads to complete nirvana. They reach the state in which “The mind stays tranquil but is constantly observant. The mind is observant but constantly stays tranquil.” This patience is higher than the tolerance of non-arising of phenomena.

The patience that leads to complete nirvana can be compared to water that is completely still. The tolerance of non-arising of phenomena can be compared to water that is slightly rippling.

It takes careful observation to detect the rippling, or else one will not see it. The water can reflect clearly. When a lake has no waves, all the views are reflected on the water. It looks beautiful. But if you look closely, you will see ripples. The surface of the lake is not perfectly still. This is like the state of bodhisattvas who have attained the tolerance of non-arising of phenomena.

In the state of bodhisattvas with the patience that leads to complete nirvana, there is no rippling at all as “The mind stays tranquil but is constantly observant. The mind is observant but constantly stays tranquil.”

Non-attachment in Meditative Concentration

In the *Essentials*, Master Ouyi’s commentary on the *Amitabha Sutra*, we read, “One does not give rise to attachments or wandering thoughts in various states of meditative concentration.”

We need to understand this statement to be able to progress toward our goal of enlightenment. One experiences joy when in meditative concentration, as the saying goes, “feeding on the joy one experiences in meditation.” Those who achieve meditative concentration often cannot advance to the next level because they are attached to the state of meditative concentration they are in.

Those who achieve the four dhyanas and the eight concentrations cannot transcend the Six Paths because they are attached to the state of meditative concentration they are in and will not let go of it. Attachment leads to greed, which is still a wandering thought.

This is to remind us to exercise wisdom. We can enjoy the state of meditative concentration but should not be attached to it. If we can achieve this non-attachment, there will be no adverse effects.

It is the same with our present situation. We can enjoy whatever we are experiencing but we should not attach to it. If discriminations and attachments arise in us, then we are wrong and will have trouble.

Reacting Wisely to External Stimuli

In the *Essentials*, Master Ouyi's commentary on the *Amitabha Sutra*, we read, "One lets go of the phenomena one sees and keeps in mind and never reminisces about them." Letting go refers to how we are to react to our external environments.

Outside stimuli often tempt us. But, ideally, when we see or hear these stimuli, we should not be attached to them. When they are over, we should not reminisce about them again. Every time we recall them, a seed is planted in our Alaya consciousness, and we create a karmic cause. Our mouths are not creating a karmic cause, neither are our bodies. It is our thoughts that are creating karmic cause.

We should often remember "All phenomena are unreal" and "All functioning phenomena are like dreams, illusions, bubbles, and shadows." This is the truth the Buddha taught us. It is very hard for ordinary people to understand and to awaken. Sakyamuni Buddha taught the Dharma for forty-nine years. He repeated the important teachings. We are familiar with them after hearing them so many times but we cannot practice them. As soon as a situation arises, we

immediately become deluded and our wandering thoughts, discriminations, and attachments arise.

Like a Dream, Like a Bubble

When we encounter our foes or unhappy situations, we can remind ourselves that as was said in the *Diamond Sutra*: “Whatever takes form is illusory” and “All compounded things are like a dream, an illusion, a bubble, and a shadow.” If we realize this, our minds will quickly become calm. We chant “Amitufo,” understanding that coming to this world is an excursion and we will be gone in a few days.

Whether the actions of others are good or bad does not relate directly to us, and we do not have to worry about it. If we have an affinity with someone, we can urge him or her to do good deeds. If we do not have an affinity, then we can try to set a good example. If the individual understands, it is his or her good fortune. If not, it is also okay.

We can try to use Buddhas and bodhisattvas as our examples for when they manifest in this world, their every thought, word, and action is to teach all beings.

So they never stop lecturing or setting examples. But as they lecture and set examples for the sake of others, it is without any thought of self-interest. In everything they do, their minds remain pure. They are completely at ease.

If one has the slightest thought of self, trouble will follow. Why? Because one makes mistakes when one has a thought of self-interest. Only when one has no thought of self-interest and has truly let go of everything will one's mind be liberated and one's wisdom be uncovered.

Obstacles in our Path

Along the path of cultivation, there are many obstacles. As in a race, we all start at the same starting line, but some progress ahead of others, some lag behind, and some are eliminated. Why? Because there are many obstacles. The obstacles may be people or situations. They may be our family and friends or those we have hurt in the past and owe karmic debts to.

Who can overcome all these obstacles and progress in their practice? Those who single-mindedly

concentrate on cultivation. In our practice, we recite the Buddha's name or our selected sutra every day. We also study the teachings every day. If we are very busy with work and family responsibilities, we can at least chant and study for a few minutes. The main thing is to practice and study every day.

As Master Chin Kung says, whenever there is an obstacle, ignore it. Carefully review and observe to make sure that one's mind and behavior accord with the teachings of the Buddha. Do not spend time and energy on trying to find a way to deal with the obstacle, or else the obstacle will become even greater.

Two Kinds of Karmic Retributions

Consciousness is the direct cause of all sufferings. Embedded in the Alaya consciousness are seeds of our residual habits. These seeds are the direct causes of all suffering as well as all happiness. Conception and impulse are "object as condition" and immediate antecedent condition. Feeling is the karmic result. You feel pain or happiness. If you plant good causes,

you will enjoy happiness. If you plant bad causes, you will undergo suffering. This law governs the Three Realms. Ordinary people do not know this principle, so the Buddha manifested in this world to tell us the truth of existence.

When we truly understand the truth, we will know what to do and will be able to help ourselves. There are causes and conditions for any being to be born in a certain path. These causes and conditions are called directive karma, or generic retribution. The karmic force controls us; we do not have the control. We are led by the karmic force. We must know this. No other beings have control over us. Karmic force does.

What karmic force brings one to the human path? The Buddha told us that the karmic force from one's observing the Five Precepts and cultivating the Ten Virtuous Conducts in past lifetimes will lead one to the human path. The karmic force from achieving the Four Immeasurable Minds of loving kindness, compassion, joy, and equanimity, and a higher level of the Ten Virtuous Conducts will lead one to the heavenly path. The karmic force from greed will lead one to the path of hungry ghosts. The karmic force from anger will lead one to the path of hells. The

karmic force from ignorance will lead one to the path of animals. These are directive karma, which determine the path we are born in.

There are about seven billion people living on the earth. They were born as humans in this lifetime as a result of having observed the Five Precepts and cultivated the Ten Virtuous Conducts in their past lifetimes. But some of these people enjoy wealth and social status while others are poor and of lowly origins, and undergo much suffering. The Buddha said this is because of their particularizing karma, or the specific retribution.

So there are two kinds of karmic retributions: directive karma, which leads us to be born in a certain path, and particularizing karma, which determines what kind of material life and spiritual life we lead. All these depend on our having cultivated good fortune or committed bad deeds in our past lifetimes.

The Source of Suffering

As beings ensnared in the cycle of rebirth, we are all subject to what is called the Eight Sufferings. The

first seven—birth, aging, illness, death, separation from loved ones, association with those we dislike, and unfulfilled desires—are suffering as retribution. The last one, the suffering due to the five aggregates, is a general description.

Where does suffering come from? The Buddha said “the suffering due to the five aggregates.” The five aggregates are form, feeling, conception, impulse, and consciousness. Form refers to the physical body. Feeling, conception, impulse, and consciousness refer to the mental activities. All living beings are made up of these five aggregates. In other words, life is the combination of matter and mind. The body is matter and thus is subject to birth, aging, illness, and death. Mentally, we are subject to the experience of unfulfilled desires, separation from loved ones, and association with those we dislike.

Don't Worry About Being Taken Advantage Of

In the sutras, the Buddha often taught us that the giving of wealth will bring wealth. Where do wealthy people get their money? They practiced the giving of

wealth in previous lifetimes. Therefore, in this life, no matter what they do, money keeps coming to them.

One should not be stingy. Do not be afraid of being defrauded. Do not think that there are a lot of bad people in this world, who always try to take advantage of you. If they defraud you, they will have to pay you back in the future.

The law of cause and effect, what we often refer to as karma, spans many lifetimes. When someone takes advantage of you financially, you are leaving the money taken for future lifetimes when it will be paid back. Do not dwell on this matter. Do not hesitate to do good deeds because of these obstacles. Just as we appreciate material things coming to us now, we will likewise appreciate them in the future, whether that future is close or distant.

A Buddhist Perspective:
Questions and Responses
from www.abuddhistperspective.org

When did Pure Land Buddhism begin and then come to China?

In India, both Asvaghosa Bodhisattva and Nagarjuna Bodhisattva helped to form the basis for Pure Land through their commentaries on the sutras.

Buddhism came to China in 67 CE. The *Shorter Sukhavati-vyuha Sutra* (*Amitabha Sutra*) and the *Longer Sukhavati-vyuha Sutra* (*Infinite Life Sutra*) were first translated from Sanskrit into Chinese sometime between 147 and 180 CE. Two other translations were done around 250 CE.

Initially, Pure Land was practiced along with other methods. In the fourth century, the first Pure Land Patriarch, Great Master Huiyuan, founded the first monastery that focused solely on Pure Land practice. Pure Land is now considered to be the most widely practiced school in Asia.

Is the Pure Land Real or abstract? Where is it?

The Pure Land exists on two levels. One level is that of unawakened beings. The ultimate level—where duality no longer exists—is the state of awakened beings.

As unawakened people, we view the Pure Land as the very real land that is far to the west of us.

But on the ultimate level of understanding, the Pure Land is already within us. We ordinary beings see everything in terms of duality: good or bad, loving or hateful, east or west. Buddhas no longer see duality. They understand that we are all one and that everything outside of us is actually already within us. “Me” doesn’t exist for we are already one with everything that is. When my mind focuses solely on Amitabha, I am Amitabha. When it focuses solely on the Pure Land, I am one with the Pure Land and it is already within me.

Who is Dharmakara?

In the presence of Lokeshvararaja, a Buddha of the

ancient past, the monk Dharmakara, after witnessing the suffering of sentient beings, spent five eons studying all the Buddha lands.

Dharmakara then made forty-eight vows, the fulfillment of which would create the Western Pure Land of Ultimate Bliss. He declared that he would not attain Buddhahood unless his vows for a perfect Pure Land, where all beings would advance along the Buddhist path and never again fall back into samsara, were accomplished.

Once his vows were accomplished, the monk Dharmakara became Amitabha Buddha. He is now speaking the Dharma in his Pure Land and helping all who are truly sincere in their personal vows to be reborn there.

Dharmakara's Aspiration

May my wisdom be as vast and deep as the sea.

May my mind be pure
and void of impurities and afflictions.
I vow to transcend numberless doors
of the realms of miserable existence,

and quickly reach the other shore
of Ultimate Enlightenment.
The poisons of greed, anger and ignorance
will forever disappear,
with the power of Samadhi
I will end all delusions and faults.
Like the past incalculable Buddhas,
may I become a great teacher
to all living beings in the nine realms,
and liberate everyone in every world
from the myriad miseries of
birth, old age, sickness and death.
I will constantly practice
the Six Paramitas of giving, precepts, patience,
diligence, concentration and wisdom.
For those undelivered sentient beings
let them be crossed over,
for those already delivered,
let them attain Buddhahood.
I would rather firmly and gallantly
seek the proper enlightenment,
than make offerings as boundless
as Ganges sands to the sages.
I wish to firmly remain in Samadhi,

and constantly emit light to shine on all.
I vow to attain a vast and pure land,
and make it's supreme adornment peerless.
For those beings amidst
the wheel of six realms,
I wish that they can
quickly obtain rebirth in my land
and enjoy the bliss.
I aspire to constantly employ compassion
to help sentient beings,
and to cross over countless beings in misery.
The power of my vow
and determination is resolute,
only the Buddha's unsurpassed wisdom
can perceive them.
Even amidst all kinds of sufferings
my vow will never regress.

~ Based on the *Infinite Life Sutra*,
translator unknown

*Isn't Chanting "Amitufo" a Religious Practice?
Can others Chant "Amitufo"?*

One can have a religious faith and still learn and practice the Buddha-dharma—the Buddha's teachings. It is like going to school. When we got to school to learn, there is no need to give up our religion.

In my classes, there are Christians, Jews, and people of other faiths as well as those who do not practice any religion. I have been invited to speak at various churches because what I teach about becoming more peaceful and selfless complements the church's teachings.

Chanting "Amitufo" is a form of meditation. It's a way of calming the mind by focusing it on one thing. The primary aim of this form of meditation is to achieve a mental state of "one-mind undisturbed," a state in which the mind focuses solely on its meditative subject.

We chant "Amitufo" to focus our thoughts on a perfectly awakened being who has perfect wisdom and compassion. When I listen intently to the sound of waves, I am not worshiping the ocean. When I meditate by concentrating on my in-breath and out-

breath, I am not worshipping my breath. In such chanting, listening intently, and concentrating, I am simply focusing my thoughts on the virtues I wish to perfectly develop. I am not worshipping.

In the same way, people who are not Buddhists can chant a Buddha's name to develop the qualities that lead to awakening.

How Should We Chant?

In *Buddhism: The Awakening of Compassion and Wisdom*, second edition, we read that in the Pure Land school: "we emulate Avalokitesvara's compassion and Mahasthamaprapta's single-mindedness. The "Chapter of the Perfect and Complete Realization of Mahasthamaprapta" in the *Surangama Sutra* tells us how Mahasthamaprapta and fifty-two fellow bodhisattvas single-mindedly concentrated on being mindful of Amitabha Buddha and on chanting his name from the time they took refuge until the time they attain Buddhahood. All they relied on was the name of Amitabha Buddha—[as the sutra says] "without the aid of any other expedient, the mind will be opened."

In other words, Pure Land practitioners do not need to rely on any other method. From their initial determination to seek enlightenment until their attainment of Buddhahood, they only need to concentrate on nianfo—on being mindful of Amitabha Buddha and on chanting his name.

How should we chant? Mahasthamaprapta taught us that the key is "the perfect control of the six senses with continuous pure thoughts." "Pure thoughts" means that when we chant "Amitufo" we should not have any doubts or other thoughts. The mind must be pure; we must chant with a pure mind. "Continuous" means that we chant with no interruption. "No intermingling, no doubt, and no interruption" is the key to success in the practice of nianfo that Mahasthamaprapta taught us. If we practice "the perfect control of the six senses with continuous pure thoughts," we will definitely succeed in our practice of nianfo.

When Should I Chant?"

With so much to do today, it can be difficult to find the ideal time to practice. It is tempting to wait until

we can do some "serious" chanting. When we are home or at our Buddhist center and have a few hours to really get into our practice.

If we wait for ideal conditions, we will end up spending very little time chanting. Most of us do not yet have enough good fortune to have ideal conditions. So we need to be appreciative and work with what we do have. It's far better to chant for ten or twenty minutes a day than wait for that one long weekly chanting session. As with all our practice, we are training to do things more effectively. As we become more skilled at focusing on "Amitufo," we will create the goodness that can result in improved practice conditions. With better conditions, comes more chanting time and more focused chanting.

Is it possible to start the practice of Buddha Name Recitation from written instructions only or does it require personal instruction for a monastic?

Response: There is no need to receive specific instructions from a Pure Land monk or nun to practice chanting "Amitufo". As you are chanting,

the sound of “Amitufo” arises in your mind. And as you utter “Amitufo,” your mind should concentrate on and embrace that sound. While chanting, do so sincerely and continuously.

How Long Should I Chant?

In chanting, as with most things we do, it's not the time involved as much as the focus and quality. If I sit on a meditation cushion in the chanting hall and chant for an hour with wandering thoughts one after another, I may look impressive but my chanting will be mediocre.

If however, I find that I have five minutes before I need to do something and quickly settle into my chanting, the benefits of my focused chanting can far outweigh my hour of wandering thoughts chasing one another around my head. Our focus should be on both quality and quantity, not just quantity.

Are there any specific approaches to repentance?

There is a beautifully moving repentance verse in the *Avatamsaka Sutra*:

All evil actions committed by me since time
immemorial,
stemming from greed, anger, and ignorance,
arising from body, speech, and mind,
I deeply repent having committed.

Personally, I find that saying this verse and prostrating along with my practice of chanting "Amituofo" to be deeply moving.

Also, talk to those you have harmed. After saying the verse, ask those you harmed to please not obstruct you on your path to rebirth in the Pure Land, and Buddhahood. Explain that seeking revenge for past harm will only bring future retaliation, which is of no benefit to them. Ask them to please allow you to practice so you can dedicate the merits to them and to all those who suffer. And assure them that upon attaining that rebirth you will come back to help them also end suffering and attain happiness.

What are Attachments?

Attachments are our desires for people, things, pleasures, wrong views, life, the idea of the self as an individual, etc. Attachments arise from delusion and lead inevitably to suffering. In our delusion, we do not understand cause and effect. Our past thoughts and behavior determine what we will receive in this lifetime. What we are destined to obtain will naturally come to us. What we are not destined to obtain, will either elude us or quickly slip through our fingers if we do manage to grasp it.

In our delusion, we do not understand the true nature of everything in our world, that all conditioned phenomena are impermanent and without an individual self. So, we cannot truly possess anything because all is impermanent: everything is in a state of change.

Our attachments lead us to have expectations, to see the world through rose-colored glasses. We then attribute qualities to people or things that they do not have. It is inevitable that these exaggerated expectations will not be met and when this happens, we become disillusioned and blame the person, object, and so on for our frustration, unhappiness, and suffering.

We can eliminate attachments by living simply and only asking for what we need. This will also enable us to conserve our good fortune. We can eliminate attachments through giving. When we can let go or give something away and do not think of it again, we have severed an attachment. We will begin to feel lighter and more contented. As our expectations are reduced, we will feel calmer and less subject to the whims of our emotions. Gradually, our purity of mind will increase.

What are Afflictions?

Afflictions are conditions or causes of pain and suffering that affect. Common afflictions are thoughts of gain or loss, of controlling others, criticism, worries, regrets, resentments, etc. Afflictions feel perfectly normal to us because we have had them for innumerable lifetimes.

Our major afflictions are greed, anger, ignorance, arrogance, and doubt. Afflictions arise because of our selfishness. As Pure Land practitioners, we chant “Amitufo” to restrain afflictions so we can eradicate

our unwholesome karmic consequences, give rise to merits and virtues, and uncover our innate wisdom.

What are Discriminatory Thoughts?

Discriminatory thoughts and attachments are the root cause of why we are still mired in samsara, the cycle of rebirth. Discriminatory thoughts occur when we see others and ourselves as two, when we still have ideas of favoring and disfavoring, and self and other. With such thoughts, we will help people we like but not those we dislike. This differentiation, which arises from our ignorance, results in our automatically reacting in a judgmental manner.

When we use discriminatory thoughts, our speech and deeds will be limited. However, when we speak and act from minds and hearts that no longer differentiate between others and ourselves, the deeds can be infinite because we will no longer be attached.

Our discriminatory minds are limited. But our true nature is infinite because everything in the universe is one. As we learn in the *Flower Adornment Sutra*, “One is all, all is one.” When we speak and act from

this non-discriminatory mind, the mind of the Buddhas, we are in harmony with the true nature and are one with the universe.

The key to suppressing and eradicating our discriminatory thoughts is to chant “Amitufo.” This single-minded chanting is speaking and acting from the non-discriminatory mind. One instant of chanting “Amitufo” puts one in harmony with the true nature and for that instant, we will be one with the Buddhas.

Supportive Buddha-name Chanting

Guidelines for Spiritual Advisors

1. Remind the patient of the suffering of this world and the joys of the Pure Land to help strengthen his or her vow to be reborn into there. The spiritual advisor should also enumerate and praise the patient's good deeds, merits, and virtues. This will help the patient to be happy and free of doubts, certain that when the time comes to die, he or she will, thanks to his or her good deeds, vows, and practice, be reborn into the Western Pure Land of Ultimate Bliss.
2. It is important to remind the dying person to cease thinking of wealth and property, as well as attachments to family and friends.
3. If the patient has written a will so much the better, but if not, it is best to counsel against writing one at this time. The advisor can also advise everyone to refrain from gossip and distracting conversations as they could rekindle the patient's attachment to this world, which is detrimental to the patient's desired

rebirth.

4. When relatives and friends come to visit, they should be discouraged from becoming emotional in the patient's presence. If they wish to help, they can stand to the side and chant "Amitufo" aloud. Explain to the visitors that crying at this time could distract the patient from the desired rebirth in the Pure Land, and result in the patient being subjected to much suffering.

5. The patient should be counseled to practice generosity and give away personal effects to those who need them. Also, the patient can purchase Buddha images, sutras, and other Buddhist materials, and request that they also be given away. This will help the patient to increase his or her merits and reduce bad karmas, and thus help to facilitate a good rebirth.

The good advisor should keep these general guidelines in mind, but be ready to improvise according to the situation.

Supportive Buddha Name Chanting

Supportive chanting by family members and Dharma friends is crucial when a patient is on the verge of death because, at that time, he or she is weak both mentally and physically. In such trying circumstances, it becomes increasingly difficult to focus on chanting “Amituofo.” This is why Supportive Buddha-name Chanting is so important.

1. To help focus the patient’s thoughts, respectfully place a statue or picture of the standing Amitabha Buddha in front of the patient where it can be easily seen. Place a container of clean water in front of this image and some fresh flowers in a vase near it. Lightly scented incense, or even a smokeless variety, may be burned. (A strong fragrance or excessive smoke might cause the patient to have difficulty in breathing.)

2. Those who come to practice supportive chanting should remember that the patient, who is in a weakened state, requires adequate fresh air. If too many people are in the room at one time, the patient may have difficulty breathing and become agitated, resulting in more harm than good. Also, people should

pre-arrange their chanting time and silently take turns, so that the chanting can continue uninterrupted. Each session can last about an hour.

3. According to Master Yin Guang, the thirteenth patriarch of the Pure Land school, the short chanting form of “Amitufo” should be used, so that the patient can easily register this name in the most subtle consciousness, at a time when both mind and body are very weak.

It would be wise to ask the patient which is preferred—“Amitufo” or “Namo Amitufo.” In this way, the patient can comfortably and silently chant along with the group. To go counter to the patient’s likes and habits may destroy his or her concentration. People should not chant too loudly so as not to expend too much energy and shorten the time they can chant. On the other hand, they should not chant in too low a voice or the sound might not register in the patient’s mind. Also, they should not speak to one another while in the room.

Chanting should neither be overly loud or soft, slow or fast. Each utterance should be clear and distinct, so that it can be heard clearly and penetrate

deep into the patient's consciousness. One caveat: if the patient is too weak or is in coma, he may have difficulty hearing the chanting. In such a case, someone should chant close to the patient's ear to help the patient to maintain a clear, steady mind.

4. With regard to instruments, it is generally better to use the small hand bell with its clear, limpid sound, as it can help the patient develop a pure and calm mind. However, this may not apply in all cases. If possible, it is best to ask the patient in advance what is preferred. If some details do not suit the patient, we should adapt to the circumstances and be flexible.

After the Patient Dies

1. Relatives should not cry in the presence of the patient, especially immediately before and after the death. Doing so can cause the dying patient to develop thoughts of attachment which can prevent the much sought rebirth and resultant liberation.

2. It is vitally important not to touch or move the body of the deceased person. Thus, people should wait at

least twelve hours, and preferably twenty-four, before washing and dressing the body.

3. Family and friends should concentrate on chanting in all earnestness and without crying for at least twelve hours. This is to allow the patient's most subtle consciousness adequate time to leave the body. If, during this period, anyone touches the body or cries, the deceased may still experience feelings of pain, sadness, anger, or self-pity, and sink again into the realms of suffering.

4. During the minimum twelve-hour period (twenty-four hours is preferable), if people can remain chanting near the deceased, so much the better. Except for chanting, nothing should be done.

5. Funeral arrangements should be simple and modest, without unnecessary expenses. Only vegetarian food should be provided for serving meat or fish will burden the departed with more karmic obstacles, making liberation that much more difficult. It is important to remember that even those who have been already been reborn into the Pure Land may still

be affected by the behavior of family and friends acting on behalf of the deceased.

Living Will

To my family and all those concerned with my care:

I, _____, of

being of sound mind, make this statement as a directive to be followed if for any reason I become unable to participate in decisions regarding my medical care.

Upon my death and transition into the next life, I do not wish to be reborn as a ghost path or an animal. I do not wish to suffer. Instead, I wish to follow Amitabha Buddha and to arrive at his Western Pure Land of Ultimate Bliss. To all my family and friends, I wish to ask for your assistance so that I may not suffer, but instead remain calm and peaceful to prepare for my arrival to the Western Pure Land.

In the event that I should suffer from a terminal illness to the extent that doctors foresee no possible recovery, I ask that no medical treatment be undertaken. Should I already be in the hospital at this point, I wish to be checked out and brought home.

Please notify my assigned family member or friend

at telephone number(s) _____

and _____.

Once home, please position me in the most comfortable, natural position in which I may rest. The assigned family member or friend will lead others in chanting “Amitufo.” Should I decline to the point where I lose consciousness and am no longer aware of my surroundings, the assigned family member or friend shall have full authority in making any decisions regarding my well-being. If this person cannot be contacted, please find a Buddhist master or Buddhist believer to aid in the chanting of “Amitufo” until the assigned person can be reached.

Within twenty-four hours prior to and after my death, I would like to ask my friends and family to comply with the following:

1. Do not touch or move my body or even my bed.
2. Do not change my clothing.

3. Do not place dry ice or other substances on my body. Sandalwood incense may be burned if there is any odor.
4. Do not let a breeze blow directly onto my body.
5. Do not allow the scent of alcohol, onions, scallions, garlic, or chives to enter the room.
6. Do not smoke, cry, or talk in the room.

My purpose for asking this is to create an atmosphere in which I may remain calm and at peace. The only sound I wish to hear is “Amitufo,” so that he may escort me to the Pure Land.

If I am at home upon my death, my family should take turns chanting “Amitufo” for eight to twenty-four hours. At this point, I will be ready to be moved, washed, and dressed. This period of chanting is the best time to assist me to be calm and peaceful. All funeral arrangements can be made afterwards. If I should pass away in the hospital, please follow hospital policy and chant as much as is allowed.

During my terminal illness and within forty-nine days after my death, all family members should adopt a vegetarian diet. I do not wish for any killing to be associated with my death. All funeral offerings must be vegetarian. The use of alcohol is strictly prohibited. Funeral arrangements should be kept simple, and proper Buddhist etiquette should be followed. I do not wish for any unnecessary excess.

Within forty-nine days following my death, I sincerely ask my family members and friends to seek my rebirth into the Pure Land, and to perform good deeds such as giving offerings to the Three Jewels of the Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha, printing sutras, helping the needy, and so on. These good deeds will help me to attain additional good karma, and further assist me in arriving at the Pure Land. Most important is for my family to sincerely chant “Amitufofo.”

In order for me to benefit the most and to peacefully arrive at the Pure Land, the above points must be followed. This will not only benefit me but all those involved as well. In this manner, I wish for everyone to learn and to believe in Buddhism. Thus, everyone

can arrive at the Pure Land, as well.

Amitufo to all.

These directions express my legal right to request or refuse treatment. Therefore, I expect my family, doctor, and all those concerned with my care to regard themselves as legally and morally bound to act in accord with my wishes.

Signed _____

Date _____

Witness: I declare that the person who signed this document, or asked another to sign this document on his or her behalf, did so in my presence and that he or she appears to be of sound mind and free of duress or undue influence.

Witness _____

Date _____

Thoughts from Master Yin Guang Thirteenth Patriarch of Pure Land Buddhism

Whether a lay or a monk or nun, we need to respect those who are older than we are and to exist harmoniously with those around us.

We are to endure what others cannot and practice what others cannot achieve.

We should do all we can on behalf of others and help them to be good.

When sitting quietly, we would do well to reflect on our own faults.

When talking with friends do not discuss the rights and wrongs of others.

In our every action, from dawn to dusk and dusk to dawn, recite the Buddha's name.

When reciting, whether aloud or silently, do not give rise to wandering thoughts.

If wandering thoughts arise, immediately dismiss them.

Constantly maintain a modest and regretful heart. Even if we have upheld true cultivation, we still need to feel that our practice is shallow and never boast.

We should mind our own business and not the business of others.

See only the good examples of others instead of their shortcomings.

We would do well to see ourselves as ordinary and everyone else as bodhisattvas.

If we can cultivate according to these teachings,
we are sure to reach
the Western Pure Land of Ultimate Bliss.

To be truly mindful of Buddha Amitabha
and give up attachments to the body,
the false mind, and worldly affairs
is *great giving*.

To be truly mindful of Buddha Amitabha
and not have any greed, anger, and ignorance
is truly *upholding precepts*.

To be truly mindful of Buddha Amitabha
and not be bothered by who is right or who is wrong
is *great tolerance to insult*.

To be truly mindful of Buddha Amitabha
and not be distracted by other thoughts
is *great focus and diligence*.

To be truly mindful of Buddha Amitabha
and not have wandering thoughts
is *great dhyana*.

To be truly mindful of Buddha Amitabha
and not be enticed by any temptation
is *great prajna*.

Try reflecting on the following: If I still have not given up the attachments to body, false mind, and worldly affairs; if greed, anger, and ignorance still arise in my mind; if I am still bothered by who is right and who is

wrong; if I have not eradicated distractions from other thoughts; if I still have not ceased my wandering thoughts; and if I am still enticed by temptations; then, I am not truly mindful of Buddha Amitabha.

Closing Thoughts

Buddhist practice is not confined to learning about Buddhist principles and chanting a Buddha's name while bowing, sitting, or walking. Buddhist practice is the development of a calmer, purer mind. It to train us to think and behave as a Buddha would in everything we do.

We strive to achieve this mindset through the previous practices as well as through less formal practice. How? By reminding ourselves daily that while all of us have many shortcomings, we should only be concerned with our own. By understanding causality and not blaming others for the difficulties in our lives. And by realizing that all beings suffer, and that only when we awaken can we truly help others to be free from pain. Ultimately, our practice will enable us to have loving-kindness, consideration, and tolerance held equally and joyfully for all.