

*Passages from the
Commentary on the
Infinite Life Sutra*

Master Chin Kung

Translated by

Silent Voices

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Translator's Notes

The following is a translation of selected passages from Master Chin Kung's 1992 commentary on the *Infinite life Sutra*, including chapters 1 through 5 and part of chapter 6.

All quotes are from the *Infinite Life Sutra* unless otherwise indicated.

Silent Voices

Preface
Passages from the Commentary
on the *Infinite Life Sutra*

- ❁ The full name of this sutra is the *Buddha Speaks of the Infinite Life Sutra of Adornment, Purity, Equality, and Enlightenment of the Mahayana School*.
- ❁ Buddha is a Sanskrit word meaning a perfect, enlightened being. He has gained complete awareness of the nature, phenomenon, and function of the whole universe, in the past, present, and future.
- ❁ There are three kinds of realization: self, helping others to achieve their own, and complete all-encompassing realization.
- ❁ An Arhat is one who has reached self-realization; a state in which one possesses no erroneous perceptions, views, speech, or behavior.
- ❁ A Bodhisattva is one who helps others to reach realization after achieving their own.
- ❁ A Buddha is one who has reached perfection in both self-realization and helping others to reach realization.
- ❁ Names of each Buddha and Bodhisattva represent their specialties within the teachings.
- ❁ Shakyamuni is the name of the historical and latest Buddha in our world who lived over 2500 years ago. “Shakya” means kindness, which represents the way we should treat others. “muni” means stillness, which represents freedom from agitation, the state in which our mind ultimately should exist.

- ❁ Buddhists regard Buddha Shakyamuni as our “Original Teacher.” Buddhism is an educational system, for the title of teacher is not found in religions, only in education.
- ❁ The aspiration of a Buddha is to help all beings to be free from suffering, to reach full realization. When the time comes for beings to accept the Pure Land teachings, great joy arises in all Buddhas.
- ❁ The power of visualization is tremendous. Everything in the universe is derived from one’s mind. Constant contemplation of the Buddha leads to becoming a Buddha, whereas a mind immersed in ignorance, greed, and anger leads one to the three lower realms of animals, hungry ghosts, and hells, respectively.
- ❁ In essence, a Buddha’s mind is equal to that of an ordinary being. However, a Buddha has a clear mind without any greed, anger, or ignorance, whereas, an ordinary being has a deluded one. This makes an ordinary being different from a Buddha.
- ❁ Amitabha is a Buddha’s name, primarily meaning Infinite Life.
- ❁ “Infinite Life” is the most important meaning within “Amitabha.” Others include infinite light, boundless wisdom, virtue, talent, and so on.
- ❁ “Amitabha” encompasses every word in the *Infinite Life Sutra*. The Western Pure Land is also contained within this name. No virtue is beyond the scope of the name “Amitabha.”
- ❁ Contemplation of Amitabha Buddha’s name all the time, persistently, and without any doubt or intermingling with other thoughts leads one to true realization.

- ❁ By purifying one's body, mind, and speech through the practice of chanting "Amitufo," one is adorned with magnificence radiated from within.
- ❁ The Western Pure Land, Amitabha's world, is a world of truth, grace, splendor, and wisdom. All beings there develop their purity from within.
- ❁ Many great masters in China, even ones from other Buddhist schools, have chosen to be reborn into the Pure Land. For example, the Zen masters Yungming of the Sung dynasty and Cherwu of the Qing dynasty.
- ❁ Chanting only one Buddha's name—Amitabha—contributes to the benefits of purifying one's mind and of being born into the Western Pure Land within the shortest period.
- ❁ The Western Pure Land has all the wonderful things that other Buddhalands have, but none of the unpleasant ones. That is why it is called the Land of Ultimate Bliss.
- ❁ All other Buddhas admire Amitabha Buddha and praise the Western Pure Land. Therefore, they strongly encourage all sentient beings to seek rebirth into Amitabha Buddha's world.
- ❁ The practice of Buddha name chanting will work effectively with pure conviction and strong determination. The practitioner who also practices according to the teachings is assured to go to the Western Pure Land and become a Buddha in one lifetime.
- ❁ Amitabha Buddha is a Buddha within one's true nature. His world also appears in one's mind. Everything essentially is a reflection of and cannot be separated from one's true nature.

- ❁ In order to attain a pure mind, one must overcome the internal obstacles of worry, delusion, and habit accumulated over eons of lifetimes, and the external obstacles of the enticements of too many adverse conditions which surround us.
- ❁ It is just a matter of thought whether we remain in or transcend samsara [the cycle of birth and death]. We make the decision. Realizing this, we can escape from this cycle by cultivating a pure mind and vowing to go to the Western Pure Land.
- ❁ How does one check to see whether one's practice is progressing? A good sign of progress is worrying less and having fewer wandering thoughts.
- ❁ The Buddha has taught us many methods to be freed from worry and delusion. If one method, sincerely practiced, does not work, one can try another, just as a doctor would give different prescriptions to patients with different illnesses.
- ❁ Master Yin Guang, the thirteenth patriarch of the Pure Land school, recommended that people in this Dharma Ending Age practice the Pure Land teachings.
- ❁ The study and practice of the Buddha's teaching follow three guidelines of following the precepts, cultivating meditative concentration, and uncovering wisdom.
- ❁ The primary methods of practice are reciting the sutra and Buddha name chanting. When reciting, one also practices the Six Paramitas of giving, precept observation, patience, diligence, meditative concentration, and wisdom. When no other thought is concerned, it is "giving." When no erroneous thought occurs, it is "precept observation." When staying with this process without interruption, it is "patience." When

reaching one's goal in recitation, it is "diligence." When focusing on recitation, it is "concentration." When insight is obtained from within, it is "wisdom."

- ❁ Diligently reciting the sutra helps one to eliminate karmic obstacles, worry, and established bad habits acquired over eons. Consequently, one attains purity, equality, and finally, ultimate realization.
- ❁ Duality is not equality: Oneness is equality. A wandering thought arising in one's mind disturbs this oneness and renders everything unequal.
- ❁ The *Infinite Life Sutra* can help everyone to become a Buddha. Everyone who follows this teaching, from a Bodhisattva to an Arhat, from an ordinary being to one in the three lower realms can become a Buddha.
- ❁ The benefits from this Pure Land teaching are so inconceivable that initially they are extremely difficult for people to believe.

Chapter One

The Assembly of Sages

Attend the Dharma Teaching

- ❁ All the teachings given by Shakyamuni Buddha were based upon true reality. Venerable Ananda learned and memorized all the teachings from Shakyamuni Buddha.
- ❁ Observing that the opportunity was near for a certain number of people to attain Buddhahood, the Buddha then initiated this Pure Land teaching.
- ❁ It was in the city of Ragagriha, on the mountain Gridhrakuta, that an assembly of twelve thousand of the Buddha's great monks, together with those great Bodhisattvas, attended this teaching.
- ❁ Shakyamuni Buddha played a leading character while other Buddhas were supporting characters, with some as his students. When Shakyamuni Buddha appeared in this world, their role-playing helped to teach all beings.
- ❁ Venerable Kondanna was the first one to actualize the achievement of an Arhat from the Buddha's teachings. His presence at this teaching represents that the *Infinite Life Sutra* is the foremost teaching for all Buddhas in helping sentient beings to escape samsara.
- ❁ Venerable Sariputra was the student foremost in wisdom. One who can believe this sutra and put this teaching into practice will attain foremost wisdom.
- ❁ Venerable Mahamaudgalyayana was the foremost in extraordinary abilities. Once one is reborn into the Western Pure Land and later becomes a Buddha, aided by Amitabha,

one recovers this foremost innate power.

- ❁ Maha is a Sanskrit word meaning great.
- ❁ The first patriarch in the Zen school was Venerable Mahakasyapa who also attended this meeting.
- ❁ Venerable Ananda did the primary work of compiling the Buddha's teachings into sutras.
- ❁ For one to become a monastic, one must have planted roots of goodness in past lives. One time Shakyamuni Buddha tested his student's ability by asking them to decide whether to accept an old man who had requested to become a monk. An Arhat is capable of knowing a being's past 500 and future 500 lifetimes. All of the Buddha's Arhat students decided against the old man's request, because they thought that he had no connection with Buddhism in his past lives. Shakyamuni Buddha then announced that many eons ago, the old man had been a woodchopper. One day when he ran into a tiger on the mountain, he climbed up a tree to escape, calling out, "Homage to the Buddha" for help. With only those few words, the old man planted his roots of goodness. In his current life, he became a monk as he had wished and later attained Arhatship.
- ❁ The Buddha gave this Pure Land teaching as a special way to help beings in this Dharma Ending Age.
- ❁ For one to be able to accept the Pure Land teaching, one must have previously nurtured countless roots of goodness.
- ❁ The attendance of the great Samantabhadra Bodhisattva at this teaching symbolized the unity of the Pure Land and Esoteric schools.

- ❁ The presence of the great Manjusri Bodhisattva symbolized the integration of the Zen and Pure Land schools.
- ❁ Both Samantabhadra and Manjusri represent that all the teachings of the Buddha are contained within this sutra.
- ❁ The name of “Amitabha” is in itself a supreme mantra. By chanting this name and vowing to go to the Western Pure Land, one can attain the utmost achievement: to be born into the Western Pure Land and become a Buddha within one lifetime.
- ❁ The great Maitreya Bodhisattva is currently in the Tusita Heaven. After 5,706,000,000 years, he will appear in the human realm and become the next Buddha in this world.
- ❁ In our current eon, one thousand Buddhas will appear in our world. Shakyamuni Buddha was the fourth; Maitreya Bodhisattva will be the fifth. These great sages came to this teaching as well.

Chapter Two The Virtues of Samantabhadra Bodhisattva Were Followed by All

- ❁ It is stated in the *Avatamsaka Sutra* that if one does not cultivate Samantabhadra Bodhisattva’s virtue, one cannot achieve the perfect awakening of enlightenment.
- ❁ The Western Pure Land is the ultimate destination for practicing Samantabhadra Bodhisattva’s Ten Great Vows.
- ❁ Many great Bodhisattvas, appearing as lay persons, attended this teaching. The first was “Worthy and Protective” Bodhisattva, the only one from our Saha world. His name teaches us that the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas always protect and help those who sincerely generate their Bodhi mind, the great compassionate mind to help all beings.
- ❁ “Skillful in Contemplation” and “Wise and Eloquent” Bodhisattvas represent true understanding. In Buddhism, if one does not have true understanding, one cannot believe this sutra. The sutra tell us that the time required for an ordinary being to become a Buddha is three great Asamkheya eons—an incalculably long amount of time. However, in this Pure Land teaching, three great Asamkheya eons can be transcended by a single thought of Amitabha Buddha.
- ❁ “Observation of Non-Dwelling” Bodhisattva reminds us of the teaching from the *Diamond Sutra*: “One’s mind should not attach to anything, then the true mind will arise.”
- ❁ “Extraordinary Ability Flower” Bodhisattva teaches us that many different abilities can be used to help sentient beings as he pledged in his vows.

- ❁ “Light Emitting” Bodhisattva symbolizes the light of wisdom. Chanting Buddha’s name will help us generate this limitless light.
- ❁ “Precious Banner” Bodhisattva symbolizes the preciousness of the opportunity to help all beings through the Buddha’s teachings. In the past, people would raise a banner from a pole in front of a Buddhist teaching center, which signaled that a lecture would be given that day.
- ❁ “Utmost Wisdom” Bodhisattva illustrates that infinite wisdom is within this Pure Land teaching.
- ❁ “Stilled Root” Bodhisattva demonstrated purification of the six sense organs [eye, ear, nose, tongue, mind, and body]. Practicing according to the Buddha’s teachings naturally purifies these six sense organs.
- ❁ “Faith and Wisdom” Bodhisattva clarified that without wisdom, one cannot believe in this teaching.
- ❁ “Vow and Wisdom” Bodhisattva told us that, after unwavering belief is developed, it is important to vow to go to the Western Pure Land. From true wisdom comes the vow.
- ❁ The elephant was the strongest animal to haul vehicles in ancient times. So the name of “Fragrant Elephant” Bodhisattva is a way to show us how great the benefit is to chant the Buddha’s name.
- ❁ “Treasury Revelation” Bodhisattva taught us that after one goes to the Western Pure Land, with the help of Amitabha Buddha, the treasury in one’s true nature will be uncovered.
- ❁ “Dwelling in the Middle” Bodhisattva represents how one’s mind

should be set on the practice in the middle path, avoiding extremes.

- ❁ “Practice of Restraint” Bodhisattva advocated two points in the Pure Land school: following the precepts and Buddha name chanting. Following the precepts disciplines one’s thoughts, speech, and behavior.
- ❁ “Liberation” Bodhisattva was the last of the sixteen great guests of honor. He represented the result one attains from this practice: to be free from worry and to attain liberation from the cycle of birth and death.
- ❁ The first fourteen Bodhisattvas teach us to recognize this Buddha Name Chanting method, and the *Infinite Life Sutra* illustrates their importance in uncovering our true wisdom.
- ❁ The fifteenth Bodhisattva represents our actual transformation by correcting erroneous ways in thought, speech, and behavior.
- ❁ The sixteenth and last of the Bodhisattvas symbolized the final outcome of the entire practice.
- ❁ All of those who attended this teaching followed the Ten Great Vows of Samantabhadra. The characteristics of this Bodhisattva are having a great compassionate mind and tirelessly fulfilling his vows.
- ❁ The first great vow of Samantabhadra Bodhisattva is “To respect all Buddhas.” Respect is to be paid to both sentient and non-sentient beings, even to inanimate objects, since all essentially have a Buddha-nature.
- ❁ Cultivating respect can help one to subdue arrogance and to

learn humility.

- ❁ The second vow is “To praise the Thus Come One.” “Thus Come One” is one’s true nature. Things that correspond with one’s true mind can be praised. Those that do not correspond with one’s true mind are to be respected, but not praised.
- ❁ One needs to have true wisdom to praise others. With this wisdom, one is able to differentiate between proper and deviated, right and wrong, and to praise the good and proper teachings not deviated ones.
- ❁ The third vow is “To make offerings extensively.” In Buddhism, the distinction between offering and giving is that offering is a form of giving or contribution with respect whereas giving is not necessarily done with respect. When making offerings, one does so with a compassionate mind, a pure mind, and a mind of equality for all beings, because everyone possesses a Buddha nature.
- ❁ The fourth vow is “To repent karmic obstacles.” Karma results from thought, speech and behavior of eons past. Karmic retribution, arising from former wrong thought, speech and behavior, blocks the wisdom, virtue, and talent within our true nature.
- ❁ Repenting karmic obstacles and the ensuing reduction of karmic retribution begins with an immediate end to wrong thoughts, speech, and behavior.
- ❁ One then should not attach to either good or bad deeds, because good karma would have one go to the upper three paths [heavens, asuras and humans], and bad karma to the lower three paths [animals, hungry ghosts, and hells]. However, whether we are in the upper or lower paths, we are

still mired in samsara.

- ❁ Accumulating pure karma is a goal of a Pure Land practitioner. Rather than resulting in rebirth [in samsara], pure karma leads the practitioner to birth into the Pure Land.
- ❁ The fifth vow is “To rejoice at other’s meritorious deeds.” Jealousy and arrogance present serious obstacles for one to overcome, not only in the pursuit of worldly progress, but even more so for one on the path to enlightenment. When others accumulate merits, one should be happy and want to help them, thus, one’s jealousy will be overcome.
- ❁ The sixth vow is “To request the turning of the Dharma wheel.” Buddhists should request all Buddhas, Bodhisattvas, and monastics to teach for the benefit of all beings.
- ❁ The seventh vow is “To request the Buddha to remain in this world.” Presently there is no Buddha in our world. We should try to have accomplished monastics remain with us, so more beings can benefit from their teachings.
- ❁ The eighth vow is “To constantly follow the Buddha’s teachings.” For a Pure Land practitioner, the *Infinite Life Sutra* is the Buddha’s guideline for one’s thoughts, speech, and behavior.
- ❁ The ninth vow is “To accommodate all sentient beings.” Filial piety is the heart of this vow. Wisdom and serenity are required for one to be patient with others. True conformation derives from one’s Bodhi mind.
- ❁ The tenth vow is “To dedicate all merits.” All merits should be dedicated to all beings and inanimate objects, existing everywhere in the universe and beyond, which in reality is our

Bodhi mind.

- ❁ Samantabhadra Bodhisattva said that his great vows could be perfectly accomplished only in the Western Pure Land. So he wished all those who suffer within all the realms in all the worlds of the ten directions, to quickly obtain rebirth into the Pure Land.
- ❁ One is to be mindful of the name “Amitabha,” for this name enables one to reflect and intensify the same merits and virtues, thus eventually achieving a Buddha’s perfection.
- ❁ All attending this assembly wanted themselves and all beings to accept this Pure Land teaching and hoped that all could reach the Buddha’s state of perfection.
- ❁ Out of their great compassionate nature of first wanting to help all sentient beings escape suffering, Bodhisattvas perfect their wisdom and virtues.
- ❁ Today, people might ask why they should help others. They do not understand the true reality of life and the universe, thinking others and they are not one, so why should they help? This is similar to one’s left hand being bitten by a mosquito. Would the right hand help to shoo away the mosquito or would it ask, “Why should I help the left hand, it isn’t me?” As worldly people, we have deluded thoughts and behavior, not realizing that all sentient beings and we are one being.
- ❁ Wandering thoughts and attachments arise when one strays away from the truth; thus, deluded beings differentiate between themselves and others. Knowing that others and self are an inseparable entity, the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas also understand that “helping others is helping oneself.”

- ❁ It is said in the *Surangama Sutra* that, “Buddhas and Bodhisattvas respond specifically to each person’s appeal due to the differences in the minds of all beings.” For example, they may appear as Avalokitesvara Bodhisattva if that is the form the individual would most willingly accept.
- ❁ When a Bodhisattva in this world is ready to attain perfect realization, he goes through the same eight phases to instruct the world. Usually this Bodhisattva is called a “Next Buddha to Be.”
- ❁ If a Bodhisattva is a “Next Buddha to Be” he lives in and descends from Tusita Heaven to the human realm where he will attain Buddhahood. This is the first phase.
- ❁ The second and the third phases are “Choosing parents” and “Being born.” When a Buddha comes to this world, he is born into a royal family. This good fortune comes naturally to him due to his great merits and virtue. In addition, in this position he can best show the world that such dignity and wealth are not the most important pursuits in one’s life.
- ❁ “Leaving home and giving up the throne” is the fourth phase to show that true happiness comes from being able to let go of worldly possessions and prestige.
- ❁ Manifestation of a Buddha requires him to take the ascetic path in his cultivation. This is to be acceptable to this world.
- ❁ Only through the strength developed from concentration and wisdom, can one overcome the obstacles presented by one’s internal afflictions and external temptations. This is the fifth phase, “Subduing Mara’s evil obstacle.”
- ❁ Severing one’s wandering thoughts and attachments will enable one to attain the wonderful reality of truth. This

representation is within the sixth phase “Attaining Enlightenment.”

- ❁ All beings have been trapped in the cycle of rebirth for countless eons. Although they have encountered Buddhism before, somehow it has only helped them to plant or reinforce their roots of goodness. With the Pure Land teaching, if a person can truly grasp this opportunity and practice sincerely, one will finally take the last glimpse at rebirth.
- ❁ The seventh phase is “Turning the Dharma wheel.” Once the Buddha achieved perfect enlightenment, the heavenly beings recognized him for what he was and requested him to teach in this world.
- ❁ Lecturing on Buddhism is turning the Dharma wheel. Turning the wheel symbolizes making this teaching available to beings in all directions. The center of the wheel is stationary while its circumference moves, representing stillness and movement in one. The center is hollow while its circumference is solid representing emptiness and existence. The wheel represents Buddhism as the most complete and perfect education.
- ❁ The Buddha’s teaching helps all beings subdue their evil obstacles, thus uncovering their true mind.
- ❁ The eighth stage is “Entering the state of Nirvana.” The person with good understanding knows that the Buddha actually is never apart from us at any time. However, those with less understanding believe that the Buddha left this world.
- ❁ A Sangha is a group of four or more people who practice the Buddha’s teachings together in accordance with the Six Harmonies.

- ❁ The Six Harmonies are:
 1. To share the same viewpoints or goals.
 2. To observe the same precepts.
 3. To live and practice together harmoniously.
 4. To not quarrel.
 5. To experience the inner peace and happiness from practicing together harmoniously.
 6. To share benefits harmoniously.

- ❁ The purpose of the Sangha is to spread the Buddha's teachings in helping all beings. Whether people are committed to propagating the teachings or dedicated to supporting them, all are equally important in achieving this purpose. Looking at a clock, one sees the minute and hour hands but not the intricate inner parts that make it work. However, if one part is missing, the hands cannot move. Only in working together as one entity does the Sangha accumulate infinite merits.

- ❁ Shakyamuni Buddha taught unceasingly, even during moments of silence. Through simply observing certain movements of the Buddha, beings with high levels of intelligence and wisdom could reach realization. His teachings not only included speech, but also languages of the body and mind.

- ❁ Not only did beings from the six paths come to learn from the Buddha, but beings from all the nine realms did as well.

- ❁ Delusion, our biggest obstacle, arises from afflictions and wandering thoughts; therefore, the Buddha taught us to first sever our afflictions and cease our wandering thoughts.

- ❁ The Buddhas and Bodhisattvas help sentient beings see through delusion to understand fully the truth of life and the universe.

- ❁ The goal of our cultivation is to replace the worries surrounding us with purity of mind. The Pure Land is our destination.
- ❁ The Threefold Learning is self-discipline, meditative concentration, and wisdom. They are important steps in one's practice.
- ❁ Even in the present age, medical science remains unable to surpass the perfect, thorough teachings of the Buddha to harmonize body and mind, which contributes to a healthy body. People who truly know how to attune their body and mind to peace and purity are immune from illnesses.
- ❁ Continued practice of the Threefold Learning will eliminate worries, abolish longings, and eradicate delusions and attachments. Only in this way can we truly understand the Buddha's teachings.
- ❁ The Pure Land school uses the sutra recitation method to help people sever their afflictions. The goal of this practice is to purify both body and mind, resulting in rebirth into the Western Pure Land.
- ❁ When wandering thoughts do not arise during sutra recitation, one's body, mind, and speech commit no evil. One is cultivating self-discipline when one does not commit any evil deeds and practices only good ones.
- ❁ One is cultivating meditative concentration when achieving single-minded recitation of the sutra without giving rise to the analytical mind.
- ❁ One is cultivating wisdom when reciting the sutra clearly and without error.

- ❁ Losing one's purity of mind to analyze its meanings during sutra recitation would be the same as reading ordinary books, thus forsaking the purpose of the Threefold Learning.
- ❁ The length of a sutra such as the *Infinite Life Sutra* is perfect for recitation because they provide us with ample time to cultivate self-discipline, meditative concentration, and wisdom.
- ❁ Eliminating the three poisons of greed, anger, and ignorance within the mind enables one to obtain a healthy mind and body. Having a healthy mind is important in helping one practice Buddhism, for without a healthy mind, one will find difficulty in accepting the true teaching.
- ❁ Conditioning one's mind is an essential step towards learning the Mahayana sutras. A good teacher will have the student concentrate on his or her cultivation of virtue before learning the sutras. Just as a dirty bowl needs to be cleaned before it can be of good use or whatever it holds will be contaminated.
- ❁ Reciting the sutras three hours or more daily for three years will deepen one's concentration. When one's concentration reaches a certain level, true wisdom can be revealed.
- ❁ What is merit and virtue? It is the pure mind derived from practice of the Three Learnings of precepts, meditative concentration, and wisdom that are obtained from years of cultivation.
- ❁ A pure mind is one without discriminations or attachments.
- ❁ Anger, one of the three poisons, is like a fire. Once a person's anger flares up, all the merit and virtues accumulated from years of diligent cultivation completely disintegrate, sending

the practitioner back to square one.

- ❁ One accumulates merit and virtue when one is able to end greed in addition to diligently cultivating giving and keeping the precepts. The practice of patience, diligence, and meditative concentration enables one to preserve one's merit and virtue.
- ❁ A person who likes to practice giving and abides by laws and customs while conducting oneself in a proper and dignified manner, will accumulate good fortune.
- ❁ Understanding what one practices is essential to one's success. Pure Land practitioners can start with the teachings from the *Infinite Life Sutra*, the *Amitabha Sutra*, and "The Chapter on Samantabhadra Bodhisattva's Vows and Cultivation."
- ❁ One needs to cultivate good fortune before wisdom.
- ❁ Those who are mindful of Amitabha Buddha can apply the practice of the Three Conditions in their daily lives. The Three Conditions, which are the first of the Five Guidelines, are the foundation upon which Pure Land practitioners begin their practice.
- ❁ Cultivating the first of the Three Conditions enables one to harvest good fortune as great as that of heavenly beings. The First Condition includes being filial and respectful to one's parents and teachers, being compassionate and not killing any living beings, and cultivating according to the Ten Good Conducts (no killing, no stealing, no sexual misconduct, no lying, no abusive speech, no divisive speech, no enticing speech, no greed, no anger, and no ignorance).
- ❁ The Second Condition consists of abiding by the Three

Refuges; following the precepts, laws and customs; and conducting oneself in a proper and dignified manner. By practicing the Second Condition, one's good fortune will be as great as that of Pratyekabuddhas and Arhats.

- ❁ One does not accomplish anything just by going through the ceremonial ritual of taking the Three Refuges. Truly taking the Three Refuges is to return from delusion, erroneous thoughts and viewpoints, and impurity, and to rely on one's enlightened true nature, proper viewpoints and thoughts, and purity within the six senses [sight, sound, smell, taste, touch, and thought].
- ❁ Practicing the Third Condition enables one to harvest good fortune like that of Bodhisattvas. One generates the Bodhi mind, deeply believes in the law of cause and effect [causality], recites and upholds Mahayana sutras, and encourages others to advance on the path to enlightenment.
- ❁ The second is the Six Harmonies, which tell how to get along with others. By practicing the Three Conditions and the Six Harmonies, one will harvest good fortune.
- ❁ After reaching a degree of attainment, one vows to practice the Bodhisattva way, teaching and benefiting all sentient beings, and working on behalf of the Buddha to publicize and advocate this ultimate perfect method of the Pure Land school.
- ❁ As one generates a true and sincere heart to learn an unsurpassable method, one will naturally meet a genuine teacher to guide the way. If one does not harbor sincerity and respect in one's learning, it is useless even to have the best teacher in the world.
- ❁ "Bodhisattvas unceasingly practice in accordance with

limitless cultivation.” To accord with Bodhisattva’s manner of living and cultivation, one applies the principles such as those within the Five Guidelines, which are the Three Conditions, Six Harmonies, Threefold Learnings, Six Paramitas, and the Ten Great Vows of Samantabhadra Bodhisattva into one’s daily lives.

- ❁ By “maturing boundless Bodhisattva’s roots of goodness” beings will be able to become Buddhas once they have perfected their merit, which involves helping all beings, until they too become Buddhas.
- ❁ “Being the mindful ones of whom all Buddhas were protective.” The kindness the Buddha shows us is like that of parents for their children, the only difference being that the Buddha remains mindful of us lifetime after lifetime, until we ourselves become Buddha.
- ❁ As we observe all the world’s phenomena, birth and death seem to exist. However, this is not so. In reality, what we perceive as birth and death is just the coming together and dispersion of causes and conditions. Thus, nothing is really gained or lost. If we can understand this concept of gain and loss, appearance and disappearance, we will attain comfort and happiness.
- ❁ Our afflictions come from caring too much about gaining and losing. When we lack something, we search for it everyday. Once we have it, we are afraid losing it. However, gaining and losing are mere false conceptions of the mind. Buddhas and Bodhisattvas fully comprehend this truth. Thus, although they have already helped innumerable beings, their minds do not attach to the notion of having helped. They have neither attachment nor the thought to accumulate merits. The minds and hearts of Buddhas and Bodhisattvas are always pure and

at peace.

- ❁ Those who simply go through daily rituals of prostrating and offering incense and fruit may not achieve as much benefit as those who practice in accordance with the Buddha's teachings may achieve.
- ❁ All the beings in the infinite universe and beyond, including us, are interrelated. In past lives, we may have been born in other worlds and been related to the beings there. When we become a Buddha or Bodhisattva, we will be able to travel to any Buddhaland that we have affinities with to help those beings walk the path of awakening. "These Bodhisattvas could appear in all the Buddhalands."
- ❁ Everything we see in this world is not real in the sense that it has a separate self, but is actually an accumulation of causes and conditions. Although we may think it is real, in the Buddha's mind, there is neither existence nor emptiness, appearing nor disappearing, gaining nor losing. This misconception of reality results in our delusion. Afflictions come from the inside and not the outside. They arise from our own deviated thoughts and viewpoints.
- ❁ The Buddha's education helps us to break through this delusion and refrain from wrong actions, thereby avoiding adverse consequences.
- ❁ Buddhas appear in this world to educate people so that we may attain enlightenment. However, they are not attached to the idea that they themselves are Buddhas or teachers. Neither are they are not attached to their ability to teach or to the idea that others are students accepting their teachings. Harboring these ideas would be attaching and discriminating, and would block one from obtaining a pure mind.

- ❁ The Buddha does not take credit for any achievements, nor does he linger on thoughts regarding his activities. Therefore, he does not become weary or overwrought like ordinary people.
- ❁ “Like a flash of lightning, Bodhisattvas can transform into different forms.” Not being attached to any forms, Bodhisattvas are able to manifest in all forms.
- ❁ There are four similes within “a flash of lightning.” First, its speed; life is short, most people do not realize how short until stricken with illness in their old age. Second, its application; a brief flare of lightning exposing the darkness which represents our ignorance. Buddhas appear in this world to help us break through this ignorance. Third, non-attachment; there is none for any Dharma, ability, phenomena, or achievement. Fourth, it is non-discriminating; lightning appears anywhere, having no discrimination over what it illuminates.
- ❁ Demons and ghosts of the world are not as terrifying as demons of the mind. These demons torment our minds and bodies causing us to suffer and age quickly. They are brought about by our false viewpoints: our worries, miseries, and attachments to things that go against our wishes create the demons that we inflict upon ourselves.
- ❁ Cultivators would do well to refrain from deviated emotions and conditions such as the absence of embarrassment and shamefulness, and the presence of jealousy, stinginess, misdeeds, drowsiness, sleep, agitation, greed, anger, and ignorance.
- ❁ Some people are unconsciously jealous of others who they feel are superior to them. These thoughts lead them to commit wrongdoings that result in ill consequences. Not only will they be afflicted by arrogance and jealousy life after life; these

negative traits will block their own path to enlightenment.

- ❁ Lacking a conscience and the ability to feel shame, one would commit any wrong. Then, one will suffer the consequences of those actions.
- ❁ Stinginess arises from greed when one will not give to help others.
- ❁ Misdeeds include all behaviors that are not virtuous and logical, thus blocking our virtuous nature.
- ❁ Sleeping too much clouds our minds and obstructs our practice of the way.
- ❁ An agitated mind is one that has many wandering thoughts and is bound by worries and unrest.
- ❁ Drowsiness is feeling tired and spiritless, and impedes one's diligence.
- ❁ The above eight afflictions, along with greed, anger and ignorance can hopelessly ensnare one in samsara.
- ❁ Chanting the Buddha's name can diminish and eliminate one's accumulated karmic transgressions from the above eight afflictions. By replacing wandering thoughts with mindfulness of the Buddha, one can eliminate countless eons of transgressions.
- ❁ The essential practice in Buddha name chanting is not quantity but quality, using every chant to replace wandering thoughts, thus, eventually reaching purity of mind.
- ❁ It may be more suitable for beginners to concentrate on sutra

recitation rather than on Buddha name chanting, as one will be aware of wandering thoughts when one recites incorrectly. Buddha name chanting is easy to do, but it is not sufficient to help beginners suppress their wandering minds. However, once a person attains deeper awareness and concentration, Buddha name chanting becomes more suitable. One chooses the method that will be most effective in countering wandering thoughts and attachments.

- ❁ One day the great Master Yuanying was meditating in his room, his mind was very calm and pure. Suddenly he thought of something and immediately went to take care of it. Getting off his bed, he headed straight out of the room. Only after he was outside, did he realize the door was still closed and locked! How did he get out? In that instant, he had forgotten that there was a door, and having no attachment, had simply gone through it. However, when the thought of the door arose, he was no longer able to go through it.
- ❁ Not knowing the empty nature of all appearances and phenomenon, we delude ourselves by not realizing their falseness. For example, if we perceive a wall as real, then we will not be able to go through it. However, perceiving one's body and the wall as not real allows one to pass through it.
- ❁ Having an affinity, a natural bond, with this world, the Buddha will stay. Once this affinity ends, the Buddha will enter Nirvana.
- ❁ The Buddha teaches us that we need to search for our true self from within, not from the outside. To search from the outside would be superstitious and futile. The need is for one to end one's afflictions, greed, anger, ignorance, and arrogance that block our true self from coming through.

- ❁ The great Zen master, the sixth patriarch Master Huineng said in the *Platform Sutra*: “Not being attached to any outside phenomenon is meditation, no thoughts arising from within is concentration.”
- ❁ Meditating is settling the mind, not just the practice of sitting in the lotus position on a cushion or platform while having wandering thoughts, one after another.
- ❁ Meditation is when one is not tempted by the exterior factors of reputation, power, prestige, wealth, the Five Desires [wealth, lust, food, fame and sleep], and impurities in the Six Senses. Concentration is when no afflictions arise from within.
- ❁ One who regards others as Buddhas, is a Buddha; whereas an ordinary person would regard the Buddha as ordinary. In other words, a bad person would regard all as bad, whereas, a virtuous person would regard all as kind and virtuous. In reality, there is no good or bad, beauty or ugliness in the world—just reflections from our mind. The outside environment changes according to one’s state of mind.
- ❁ When one sees others as displeasing, repulsive, and so on, this perception comes from the afflictions arising from within one’s own mind and has nothing to do with exterior factors. “True practitioners do not see the faults in others.” [*Platform Sutra*]
- ❁ When one’s true nature arises from within, it also naturally brings out one’s infinite wisdom and virtuous capabilities. This is true goodness.
- ❁ For most people the usual driving force behind their hard work is reputation and wealth. For enlightened beings, the driving force in the Buddha’s teaching is compassion and wisdom. With wis-

dom, one sees very clearly the true reality of life and the universe, regarding others as oneself. With compassion, one understands that spreading the Buddha's teaching is one's duty and responsibility. One does so without any expectation of reward.

- ❁ There are two kinds of understanding: that of the truth of our existence and the universe, and that of reaching deeper realization from cultivation. The first one is understood through the Buddha's and Bodhisattva's teachings, the latter by relying on our own diligent practice.
- ❁ There are many methods within Shakyamuni Buddha's teachings. In the Pure Land school one does not need to reach as many levels of accomplishment before becoming a Buddha. Reciting Amitabha Buddha's name with unwavering belief, vowing to reach the Pure Land, and practicing diligently will enable one to be reborn into the Western Pure Land.
- ❁ "Numberless and limitless Bodhisattvas like these came and gathered together. There were also five hundred nuns, seven thousand laymen, five hundred laywomen, and Brahma gods from the realms of Sensuality and of Form who attended the assembly."
- ❁ Not only these twenty thousand attended this teaching, but uncountable other beings from higher realms attended as well. This signifies the great importance of this teaching.

Chapter Three

The Original Cause of the Great Teaching

- ❁ “Witnessing Shakyamuni Buddha radiating light and showing wonderful signs, Ananda gave rise to a rare heart and requested an explanation.” In response, the Most Honored One spoke of this convenient, ultimate, straightforward, and rare treasure of truth.
- ❁ Convenient means the sutra is both easy to understand and to practice.
- ❁ Mahayana sutras, such as the *Lotus Flower Sutra* and the *Avatamsaka Sutra*, explain the way of becoming enlightened. Nevertheless, both of them are difficult to comprehend and even more so to practice.
- ❁ The *Infinite Life Sutra* provides a convenient method while it aims for the highest goal—to become a Buddha.
- ❁ “At that time, the Buddha radiated a glorious and awe-inspiring light...like that of melting gold. As in a finely polished mirror, the reflection shone through the Buddha’s translucent body.” All these signs indicated the enlightened nature of his body and mind, like that of a perfectly clear crystal.
- ❁ “He reflected great radiance and manifested myriad changes.” All these were causes for giving this teaching of the sutra.
- ❁ Why was the Buddha so supremely radiant? Because he was incomparably joyful. This was the happiest day for Shakyamuni Buddha. At last, the opportunity had arisen to give this ultimate and convenient teaching.

- ❁ While Shakyamuni Buddha was contemplating on Amitabha Buddha, all other Buddhas in the ten directions were contemplating on Amitabha Buddha and propagating this sutra as well. Uniting with others, this brilliant power of concentration was focused through Shakyamuni Buddha, thus making him appear extraordinarily magnificent.
- ❁ Our face is a reflection of our state of mind. If one has a kind heart, it is reflected in a compassionate appearance. If one has a corrupted mind, it is reflected in a cruel face.
- ❁ The Buddha's appearance is a perfect one. As we are mindful of the Buddha, we will gradually acquire the body and mind of a Buddha. This will then be reflected in our bearing.
- ❁ In all the years Venerable Ananda had been with Shakyamuni Buddha, he had never seen him as magnificent as he was at that time. On the behalf of all sentient beings, Venerable Ananda requested this teaching.
- ❁ "Venerable Ananda rose from his seat, bared his right shoulder, knelt on one knee and placed his palms together in veneration and addressed the Buddha."
- ❁ When requesting instructions from our teacher, it is appropriate to rise from our seat.
- ❁ In India, when people wished to show the utmost respect for someone, they would bare their right shoulder and kneel on their right knee. Kneeling on the right knee enables one to rise at anytime to serve the teacher.
- ❁ When palms are placed together as one, they represent concentration and respect. Separated fingers indicate a scattered mind.

- ❁ With concentration, one is ready to accept the Buddha's instructions.
- ❁ Venerable Ananda asked, "World Honored One, today you have entered the great samadhi...could you explain to me its significance?"
- ❁ The Buddha was in the Contemplating Amitabha Buddha Samadhi, a perfect samadhi.
- ❁ On this day, Shakyamuni Buddha was practicing a very special method. He was about to speak of a way that equally helps all beings to become enlightened.
- ❁ In the *Diamond Sutra*, Venerable Sariputra had raised two questions. First, where should our minds dwell? Second, how do we overcome our wandering minds? The answer is simple. In the Pure Land school, dwelling in mindfulness of Amitabha Buddha overcomes our wandering thoughts.
- ❁ All the Buddhas contemplate Amitabha Buddha and the magnificence of the Western Pure Land. This is the way they guide all beings together on the path to enlightenment.
- ❁ The greatest teacher is one who, without discrimination or bias, teaches all the ways to attain Buddhahood.
- ❁ Contemplating Amitabha Buddha is contemplating his forty-eight vows, in which every vow is to equally help all sentient beings to become enlightened.
- ❁ All the Buddhas of the past, present and future are mindful of Amitabha. Likewise, Amitabha Buddha is mindful of them.
- ❁ The Venerable Ananda pondered: Today, Shakyamuni Buddha

is displaying a magnificent aura. He must be contemplating the Buddhas in other worlds; otherwise, his countenance would not be so extraordinary. Therefore, he asked the Buddha.

- ❁ Shakyamuni Buddha replied to Ananda: “Excellent! Excellent!” The first “Excellent” means the time has come for this teaching to be given so that all beings may become Buddhas within one lifetime. The second “Excellent” means the fulfillment of the Buddha’s wish that every being may become a Buddha quickly, not just to become an Arhat or a Bodhisattva.
- ❁ Human life is as short as a flash of lightning, appearing and vanishing in milli-seconds. Moreover, there is nothing in this world we can truly grasp, since in reality everything is an illusion.
- ❁ It was said that when one offers a Pratyekabuddha a bowl of rice, one would not suffer poverty for many eons. As an example, Venerable Mahakasyapa had made offerings to a Pratyekabuddha; consequently, he would not be poor for nine billion eons.
- ❁ By requesting the true teachings, the merit Ananda obtained was one billion times more than that of making offerings to countless numbers of Arhats or Pratyekabuddhas living in one galaxy.
- ❁ Today, if we recite and study the *Infinite Life Sutra*, and introduce it to others, we will gain the same merits as did Venerable Ananda.
- ❁ Those who believe and vow to go to the Western Pure Land, and are mindful of Amitabha Buddha will be born there

without retrogression and eventually become Buddhas. This is true liberation.

- ❁ To rise from hell to the hungry ghost realm, to the animal realm and even up to the heaven realm is only liberation to a certain extent. If we do not break out of samsara, no matter how much we rise, we will not be truly liberated.
- ❁ The kindness the Buddha has shown us is far beyond that of our parents. The compassion that our parents have offered us lasts for only one lifetime, whereas, the Buddha's compassion continues unceasingly life after life.
- ❁ One goal of the Buddha's appearance in this world is to bring us the true and beneficial teaching. For example, the teaching given in the *Infinite Life Sutra* shows us the way to single-mindedly contemplate Amitabha Buddha and to reach the Pure Land.
- ❁ It is an extremely rare opportunity to be born as a human. If one carefully examines his or her thoughts each day, how many of these arise from greed, anger, or ignorance? Greed can be as simple as wishing for something more than the essentials. Anger can be felt as irritation or jealousy. Ignorance arises simply by lacking knowledge of proper thoughts and behavior. Greed leads one to the hungry ghost realm, anger to the hells, and ignorance to the animal realms. The thoughts that preoccupy us the most, especially the ones during our last moments will determine the where we are reborn.
- ❁ Of the six billion people in this world, how many have encountered Buddhism? Among these, how many have learned about Mahayana Buddhism? Of these, how many know of the Pure Land school? Among Pure Land Buddhists, how many have practiced single-mindedly? Through this process of

elimination, we find that very few will attain Buddhahood in one lifetime.

- ❁ Today we freely distribute thousands of copies of the *Infinite Life Sutra* to the public. It would be worthwhile even if only one or two people truly believed, cultivated, and were able to reach the Western Pure Land.
- ❁ To be able to renounce this Saha world and single-mindedly vow to reach the Western Pure Land is the result of one's good fortune and accumulated merit.
- ❁ What are roots of goodness? One possesses roots of goodness when one truly believes and understands the Buddha's teaching.
- ❁ One who believes in the *Infinite Life Sutra* and is willing to practice accordingly with a joyful heart, has already made offerings to countless Buddhas. This person should feel extremely fortunate, since his or her roots of goodness brought this about.
- ❁ Why are we still deluded, confused and receiving retributions? Because we have neither meditative concentration nor wisdom.
- ❁ In order to attain concentration, one only need be concerned whether one is abiding by the precepts and not whether others are. When concerned with other people's practices, one's own concentration will not be achieved. This preoccupation deters purity of mind. When one regards all others as having the purest of minds, that person's mind will reflect this purity and achieve concentration.
- ❁ The Buddha's concentration and wisdom are perfect.

- ❁ The liberation of an Arhat cannot compare with that of a Pratyekabuddha, which cannot compare with that of a Bodhisattva. A Bodhisattva's cannot compare with that of a Buddha for a Buddha's liberation is the ultimate liberation.
- ❁ The Buddha's perfect concentration and wisdom give rise to ten kinds of freedom.
- ❁ First, freedom from limited life span: One will never grow old as one controls longevity, when one's willpower surpasses karma's control.
- ❁ Second, freedom from the deluded mind so there are no wandering thoughts, worries, or attachments.
- ❁ Everyone's good fortune is different. There is really no way one can change others' lives simply with worries, as everyone's life experiences are governed by the law of causality. Once this is understood, one will truly understand that worrying about others is a form of deluded thoughts and, is thus, pointless.
- ❁ Third, freedom from material needs: One will never lack daily necessities.
- ❁ The more one possesses, the more one worries. One might worry over which possession to use, how to protect possessions, or how to acquire new ones. Having freedom from material needs means using what one has and not worrying, even if one could have as much as one desired.
- ❁ Fourth, freedom of activities: For example, the Buddha is free to appear in any form that is appropriate to help beings in the nine realms.
- ❁ Fifth, freedom of birth: One can choose which family to be

born into.

- ❁ Sixth, freedom from ignorance: One intuitively possesses all knowledge without obstacles.
- ❁ When one possesses knowledge, one needs to be clear as to whether the people of that particular time are able to wisely use that knowledge. If not, then it is best to withhold it, thus preventing any catastrophes from happening.
- ❁ Seventh, freedom of vow fulfillment: Everything that one vows to do will come to fruition.
- ❁ Eighth, freedom of extraordinary abilities: One possesses such abilities in the six senses of sight, hearing, smell, taste or speech, thought, and action.
- ❁ Ninth, freedom of Dharma: A Buddha's teaching is excellent in that all the beings can comprehend his direct teachings without any misunderstanding.
- ❁ Tenth, freedom of wisdom: A Buddha knows all the lives of all beings in the ten directions, in the past, present, and future, and how to fit his teachings to each individual being.
- ❁ When one's mind is at its purest, one can achieve these ten freedoms. All beings inherently possess the potential of achieving the qualities of a Buddha.

Chapter Four

The Causal Ground of Bhiksu Dharmakara

- ❁ “In past, inconceivable countless eons ago, there was a Buddha who appeared in the world named Lokesvara.”
- ❁ Lokesvara Buddha appeared in this world when people were very conservative and extremely law-abiding, following the letter of the law and not the spirit. The name Lokesvara means to be comfortable and at ease while still following the rules, which is what this Buddha was trying to convey.
- ❁ Every Buddha, including Lokesvara Buddha, has the same ten titles to represent their infinite wisdom, virtues, and abilities.
- ❁ First, “Thus Come One” is one who truly understands that the intrinsic nature and the extrinsic form are one inseparable entity.
- ❁ Second, “Worthy of Offerings” indicates that a Buddha deserves offerings from all beings for his perfection in knowledge and cultivation of virtue. Sowing in the field of merit, by making offerings to the Buddha, enables one to harvest good fortune in the future.
- ❁ One important reason why Buddhists make offerings to Shakyamuni Buddha is to repay our gratitude for his being our original teacher; the offerings remind us to respect our teachers and their teachings, but not to blindly worship them. Another important reason is to acknowledge and emulate the virtuous; vowing to become a Buddha also.
- ❁ Third, “Perfect Enlightenment” is the abbreviated form of Supreme Unbiased Perfect Enlightenment.

- ❁ Fourth, “Perfection in Wisdom and Cultivation” means one’s understanding and practice reach full completion.
- ❁ Fifth, “Skillful in Non-attachment”. All Buddhas are neither bound by birth and death nor by the state of Nirvana.
- ❁ Sixth, the “Knower of the Worlds” comprehends everything in the universe.
- ❁ Seventh is the “Unsurpassed Scholar.”
- ❁ Eighth, “Great Hero” is what the Buddha is by guiding all beings in their individual practices and solving their problems through his teachings, achieving what others cannot.
- ❁ Ninth is “Teacher of Heavenly Beings and Humankind.”
- ❁ “Buddha, the World Honored One” is the person who has already attained perfect complete realization and the above nine virtues, thus deserving the respect of the world, though he is not attached to his achievements, and views himself as equal to all beings. This concludes the ten titles for all Buddhas.
- ❁ Lokesvara Buddha taught for forty-two eons. This indicates that the life span of a human being at that time was longer.
- ❁ “At that time, a great king by the name of World Abundant heard the Buddha’s teaching.”
- ❁ After King World Abundant received the teaching from Buddha Lokesvara, he decided to give up his kingship to become a monk. He was renamed Dharmakara, meaning “Dharma Treasure.”

- ❁ Giving up the kingship is an example of abdicating worldly attachments to pursue self-realization, while dedicating oneself to educate others in the Buddha's teaching; thus, one serves all sentient beings, not just in this world, but in the infinite universe and beyond.
- ❁ To create good fortune for all, one contributes one's wisdom and capabilities. Ordinary people only think of themselves, their family or perhaps even their country; whereas, a realized person strives to help all sentient beings break through delusion to find true liberation.
- ❁ Dharmakara started practicing the Bodhisattva's way, which helped him to attain an awakened mind.
- ❁ A Bodhisattva can be any person in any place. They are no different from us except that they do not have any discriminations and attachments, and are unaffected by worries and troubles in their daily lives and work. For example, spiritual or religious leaders can be Bodhisattvas, guiding beings from delusion, improper thoughts and viewpoints, and polluted thinking.
- ❁ Dharmakara was an extraordinarily talented person, who in many ways had already surpassed most people. In his past lives, Dharmakara must have practiced extensively the giving of wealth, fearlessness, and teaching in order to be born into a royal family and to have wealth, longevity, intelligence, and wisdom.
- ❁ By practicing diligently the Buddha's teaching, Dharmakara reached the utmost achievement.
- ❁ As the power of mindfulness and wisdom enhanced Dharmakara's determination to achieve in his practice without

retrogression, he began to formulate his great vows. No one could surpass him.

- ❁ “He went to visit the Buddha, showed his respect by prostrating [and then knelt on one knee].”
- ❁ Prostration is one form of practice. When prostrating, one should do so with a sincere and pure mind, and without wandering thoughts. Thus, one cultivates concentration in addition to obtaining a healthy body.
- ❁ “He placed his palms together in reverence towards the Buddha, praised him with these verses, and made the great vows.”
- ❁ “The Thus Come One has a subtle, wonderful, and majestic appearance, which no one in the universe can equal.” This is one of the reasons why people like to get close to them.
- ❁ “The Buddha’s light shines without limit throughout the ten directions, covering even the brightness from the sun and moon.” This verse praises the Buddha’s light and wisdom representing purity, equality, wisdom, and compassion.
- ❁ “The World Honored One can present with a sound and make all kinds of beings understand in their own languages.” When the Buddha gives a teaching, people from different regions in the world understand it. Moreover, all heavenly beings, Bodhisattvas, and Arhats from other worlds and realms who attend will also comprehend.
- ❁ “The Buddha can manifest in a subtle and wonderful appearance, and enable all beings to see him as their own kind.” The appearances of the Buddhas or Bodhisattvas are images projected from the minds of different beings.

- ❁ The above verses praise the Buddha’s virtuous capabilities.
- ❁ “I [Dharmakara] wish to attain the Buddha’s pure and clear sound, and let the Dharma voice universally reach limitless boundaries.”
- ❁ “I aspire...to penetrate the profound, subtle, and wonderful Buddha’s teaching. May my wisdom be as vast and deep as the sea, and my mind pure and void of impurities and afflictions.”
- ❁ Although one may not be verbally chanting the Buddha’s name at all times, it is important to be mindful of the Buddha unceasingly or else wandering thoughts may arise. Wandering thoughts are what pull us back into the endless cycle of rebirth. In other words, if a Pure Land practitioner is not truly practicing for the Pure Land, he or she is practicing for the six realms of rebirth.
- ❁ Pure mind and true wisdom prevent one from falling into the three bad realms; moreover, they lift one up to reach the perfection of the mind.
- ❁ “The poisons of greed, anger, and ignorance will forever disappear; with the strength of samadhi I will end all delusions and faults.”
- ❁ Three roots of goodness for ordinary people to develop are ridding themselves of the Three Poisons of greed, anger and ignorance. Bodhisattvas have already eradicated these three. They concentrate on cultivating diligence.
- ❁ Strength developed from Contemplation of Amitabha Buddha Samadhi may dissolve all past transgressions, and uncover our wisdom by ending greed, anger, ignorance, and delusion. This enables our inner brightness to shine through. We achieve this

by sincere mindfulness of Buddha Amitabha and cultivate without doubt, intermingling with other thoughts and methods and without cessation.

- ❁ In the *Surangama Sutra*, Great Strength Bodhisattva taught us to use the Buddha name chanting method to constantly maintain a pure mind void of thoughts. This will eventually uncover our true mind, leading us to the state of samadhi.
- ❁ “Like the past incalculable Buddhas, may I become a great teacher to all living beings in the nine realms.” Dharmakara wished that one day he would be a teacher to the beings in the whole universe like other countless Buddhas in the past, present and future.
- ❁ “And liberate everyone in every world from the myriad miseries of birth, old age, sickness, and death.” A great teacher helps to liberate all beings in the six realms from the suffering of birth, aging, sickness, and death. He also helps those enlightened beings who have transcended rebirth but have not yet become a Buddha, to transcend their remaining ignorance.
- ❁ “I will constantly practice the Six Paramitas of giving, precept observation, patience, diligence, concentration, and wisdom.” Bodhisattvas themselves not only practice the Six Paramitas but also encourage others to practice as well.
- ❁ The first of the Six Paramitas is giving. There are three kinds of giving. The giving of wealth results in attaining wealth. The giving of knowledge, either worldly or spiritual, results in intelligence or insight. The giving of fearlessness results in longevity and good health.
- ❁ All of the infinite afflictions can be subsumed into six basic afflictions: greed, anger, ignorance, arrogance, doubt, and

erroneous viewpoints. These six can all be categorized under “greed.” Anger arises when one cannot satisfy the greed within. Once greed is satisfied, anger naturally subsides. The practice of giving neutralizes greed, the worst of the three poisons.

- ❁ To rid ourselves of greed, we first reflect deeply to see what we crave the most. Starting from there, we proceed to let go of reputation, wealth, the five desires, and the temptations of the six dusts which are pollutants of the six senses.
- ❁ One creates obstacles for oneself by being unable to give. Reading *Liaofan’s Four Lessons* is a good basis for developing the paramita of giving. Understanding the truth of causality, one will have the courage and joy to let go.
- ❁ When letting go of what one is destined to have, one will still receive what one is destined to. One will not be able to discard what one was meant to have, nor will one be able to keep what one was not meant to have. Furthermore, using devious means will not retain it either, but will instead bring disaster.
- ❁ The life of a human being is mapped out at birth. Bodhisattvas, heavenly beings, and kings of the underworld do not control destiny. Destiny is determined by the causes one planted in previous lives as well as in this life. Thus, one will either experience suffering or happiness in this life. However, one’s thoughts, speech, or behavior, resulting in good or bad retributions, can change destiny.
- ❁ Giving is not discarding, but gaining. It is actually a way of earning interest, but even more secure than that of a bank. Banks can go bankrupt. The value of a dollar may fall. However, the value within the acts of true giving will never diminish.

- ❁ The second paramita is precept observation. Its extended meaning is to follow the laws and customs wherever or whenever they apply.
- ❁ It is essential to practice giving before precept observation because without giving to neutralize the greed, one is unable to observe the precepts [laws, customs, etc.]. For instance, when greed is in control, one thinks only of ways to possess wealth, not how to observe laws. An example of this is tax evasion.
- ❁ Cultivating the Ten Good Conducts always brings good results. But while the result is good, this will only help one to reach the heavens. One is still mired in rebirth. Observing the precepts, however, brings the profound benefits of transcending samsara.
- ❁ The third paramita is patience. It teaches us to be patient in everything we say and do.
- ❁ It takes great patience to transcend samsara. For all its simplicity and ease, the Buddha Name Chanting method calls for patience in maintaining continuity, without doubt or intermingling. Though it may be hard at first, the result is attaining a certain degree of purity of mind, which brings out the true self, joy and true happiness; giving one the utmost enjoyment in life.
- ❁ With patience, Buddha Name Chanting elevates one's state of mind, level by level, enabling one to experience utmost happiness. The practice of giving is the first level, precept observation the second, and patience the third. Like constructing a building while disregarding the first level, not being able to give will hinder one from reaching the second or the third levels.

- ❁ The fourth paramita is diligence. Diligence is being skillful and focusing on only one subject which brings a meaningful outcome. To succeed, one needs to concentrate on one method. People who attained achievements in this world initially specialized in one subject. For those who study a variety of fields simultaneously, it is very hard to rise above the ones who have specialized.
- ❁ Upon reaching a certain level through profound cultivation in one method, we end affliction to open our mind. The more we focus on one simple method, the faster we advance. The more we intermingle with numerous difficult methods, the slower we advance.
- ❁ Because all sutras originate from the true nature, when one thoroughly understands one sutra, one understands all sutras.
- ❁ The fifth paramita is deep concentration. Insight gained from the practice of meditative concentration helps us to truly suppress afflictions.
- ❁ The sixth paramita is wisdom. With firm concentration, we can awaken our realization, turning affliction into enlightenment and thus, truly severing our afflictions. At this point, one thoroughly understands the true reality of life and the universe, and of causality, thereby attaining the great liberation.
- ❁ “For those undelivered beings, let them cross over [to the other shore].” For beings who have not had the chance to encounter the Buddha’s teaching, let the seed be planted so that in the future they will encounter these teachings.
- ❁ “For those already delivered, let them attain Buddhahood.” For those with roots of goodness able to accept the Buddha’s

teaching, the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas will help them to progress rapidly to Buddhahood.

- ❁ The *Infinite Life Sutra* is the passport that the Buddha gave us to go to the Western Pure Land. Although we possess it, it may not be ours to use. Only when we are familiar with and practice its teachings, does it become ours to use.
- ❁ When lacking roots of goodness, good fortune, merit, causes and conditions from the past, all one has to do is to nurture more in the present. Studying, and reciting and understanding the sutras, will help to eliminate doubt and inspire unwavering belief in the Pure Land.
- ❁ “I would rather firmly and gallantly seek proper enlightenment, than make offerings as boundless as Ganges sands, to the sages.” The Ganges is the largest river in India with sand as fine as flour. This simile is often used in the sutras to describe an uncountable number.
- ❁ Making offerings to innumerable Buddhas and Bodhisattvas brings incredible good fortune. Yet, this fortune can only be enjoyed in the three good realms of samsara. Rather than staying in samsara, a Pure Land practitioner should put all their efforts into attaining rebirth in the Western Pure Land.
- ❁ The following eight verses are Bhiksu Dharmakara’s great vow to become a Buddha.
- ❁ “I wish to firmly remain in samadhi, and constantly emit light to shine on all.” Bhiksu Dharmakara would stay in the Buddha Contemplation Samadhi. The bright light generated from him would shine on all beings in the ten directions.
- ❁ “I vow to attain a vast and pure land...” The Western Pure

Land was created from Bhiksu Dharmakara's great pure vows. Beings are reborn in that land as the result of their pure karma.

- ❁ "...and make its supreme adornment peerless." The splendor of the Western Pure Land is unequaled by any other Buddhalands.
- ❁ Bhiksu Dharmakara did not establish the Pure Land for himself, but to provide an ideal environment for all beings to come and practice to eventually become a Buddha.
- ❁ "For those beings in samsara, I wish that they can quickly obtain rebirth in my land and enjoy the bliss." Bhiksu Dharmakara wished to provide his utmost help to those subject to rebirth. It would bring them peace and happiness if they could reach his world—the Western Pure Land.
- ❁ Bliss is the result of peace. However, harmony has to be achieved before peace ensues.
- ❁ In one's practice, one nurtures the Five Virtues of gentility, kindness, respectfulness, thriftiness, and humility. With others, one practices the Six Harmonies.
- ❁ "I aspire to constantly employ compassion to help sentient beings and to cross over countless beings in misery." The extent of Bhiksu Dharmakara's compassion to help all beings is beyond time and space; it is endless and dimensionless.
- ❁ Bhiksu Dharmakara's compassion, which rose from the purity and equality of his mind, led him to vow to help all sentient beings cross over the river of rebirth to the other shore of enlightenment.

- ❁ “The power of my vow and determination is resolute; only the Buddha’s unsurpassed wisdom can perceive them.”
- ❁ “Even amid all kinds of suffering my vow will never retrogress.” Although he would undergo all kinds of suffering, Bhiksu Dharmakara would never waiver in his vows.

Chapter Five Ceaseless Cultivation With Vigorous Devotion and Utmost Sincerity

- ❁ To be enlightened, one first generates the Bodhi mind.
- ❁ Generating a Bodhi mind is vowing to attain Buddhahood so that one can help all beings. Great Master Ou Yi stated that vowing to be born into the Western Pure Land is the supreme Bodhi mind.
- ❁ Both worldly and spiritual Dharma are not real but illusive. Only the Western Pure Land is real as indicated by infinite life, which is the most important of all infinities. With it, one can enjoy all that is wonderful and magnificent.
- ❁ A truly awakened person will be sincerely mindful of Amitabha Buddha from day to night and night to day.
- ❁ If a person listens to Dharma talks, recites the sutra, and chants “Amitabha” without diligence and constancy, he or she is not truly awakened.
- ❁ How to chant the Buddha’s name? Silently or aloud? Four syllables [Amitabha] or six [Namo Amitabha]? The Pure Land method is the simplest and easiest without fixed forms. It is up to the practitioner to decide what is most suitable for him or her.
- ❁ Chanting the Buddha’s name aloud helps to suppress afflictions. When we chant aloud, we can chase away wandering thoughts and drowsiness, thus concentrating our mind. When we are alert, we can chant silently but continuously. We need to know which is most fitting.

- ❁ There is no fixed form in chanting the Buddha’s name, but there is a basic principle—to let our mind become quiet, peaceful, and without wandering thoughts. This is one of the purposes in chanting the Buddha’s name.
- ❁ We can do walking meditation while chanting. When we feel tired, we can sit and continue chanting. If we feel stiff when sitting, we can walk or prostrate. In this way, we can adjust our body accordingly.
- ❁ The more we chant and are mindful of Amitabha Buddha, the less our wandering thoughts will arise, the purer our mind will become, and the more wisdom we will attain. If not so, then something is incorrect in our way of practice. Therefore, we need to know how to harmonize our body and mind to keep our mind peaceful and quiet, and our body active and healthy.
- ❁ The [longer] title of the *Infinite Life Sutra* clearly explains that one chants the Buddha’s name with a pure, non-discriminating, and awakened mind. One uses the chanting method to attain a pure, non-discriminating, and awakened mind. The chanting enhances this state of mind, which in turn enhances further the chanting.
- ❁ “After Bhiksu Dharmakara spoke these verses, he addressed the Buddha and said, ‘I wish to practice the Bodhisattva way.’” The Bodhisattva way is to help all beings.
- ❁ Bhiksu Dharmakara vowed to attain Perfect Complete Enlightenment—to become a Buddha—to help sentient beings, not to help himself.
- ❁ The Four Universal Vows of Buddhas and Bodhisattvas are:
 1. Sentient beings are innumerable, I vow to help them all.

2. Afflictions are inexhaustible, I vow to end them all.
3. Ways to practice are boundless, I vow to master them all.
4. Enlightenment is unsurpassable, I vow to attain it.

Today, we wholeheartedly vow to be born into the Pure Land to become a Buddha like Amitabha Buddha so we can help all beings. To do this, we start with the first vow, then proceed to the second vow, then the third, and finally, the fourth. Before attaining unsurpassable enlightenment, one needs to master the ways of practice. Before one masters the ways of practice, one needs to end afflictions. And before beginning to end afflictions, one needs to vow to help all beings.

- ❁ Will one who truly generates such a great, ultimate vow to become completely enlightened create any bad karma or evil thoughts? Absolutely not. Could this person give in to temptation? Of course not. Not even when faced with the opportunity to be the president of a country or the king of the Mahabrahman Heaven. One whose goal to become enlightened is so pure and proper, that such a person would not be tempted even by such opportunities.
- ❁ In order to eradicate the roots of birth and death, the first priority is to sever afflictions and then vow to go to the Western Pure Land. Once we sever our afflictions and attain Buddha Mindfulness Samadhi, we are certain to go to the Pure Land. We need to set this as our most important goal in this life.
- ❁ “Ways to practice are boundless, I vow to master them all.” [Four Universal Vows] Life is short; we need to wait until we reach the Pure Land, where we will have the best of teachers and classmates to learn from, and the time to study and master all the sutras.
- ❁ Many practitioners were in a hurry to accomplish the third and

fourth Universal Vows in this lifetime. They studied and practiced many different methods, failed to obtain a pure mind, and were unable to end their afflictions. As a result, they missed this rarest opportunity to achieve attainment in this life.

- ❁ Many people practice Buddhism only for themselves, to have successful careers, health, and longevity, or to keep their family from harm. They may practice for a lifetime, only to remain mired in samsara. Their goal was only to seek the good fortune of humans and heavenly beings.
- ❁ Buddhas and Bodhisattvas are not celestial beings, for celestial beings are still mired in samsara. They are deluded and do not totally understand the true reality of life and the universe.
- ❁ “I entreat the Buddha to extensively proclaim to me the sutras and the Buddha Dharma. I will uphold and cultivate them accordingly.” This illustrates Bhiksu Dharmakara’s learning approach. If one is not thoroughly awakened, one will not be so determined in cultivating and upholding the teacher’s guidance.
- ❁ Upon finding one’s behavior, thoughts, and viewpoints to be in conflict with the teachings in the sutra, one should correct them or else no matter how many times one recites, it would be futile because no meaningful results would be gained. When some cultivators fail to receive positive effects from recitation, instead of reflecting within, they may blame Buddhas and Bodhisattvas, in effect slandering them. In so doing, the cultivator will be born into the hell realm.
- ❁ How much the teacher will instruct depends on the learning attitude of the student. The more the student can uphold and cultivate, the more the teacher will impart.

- ❁ Bhiksu Dharmakara vowed that when he became a Buddha, his wisdom, light, the land where he lives, and what he teaches would be known by all beings in infinite Buddhalands in the ten directions.
- ❁ All sentient beings of the six realms in the ten directions who go to the Pure Land will first become Bodhisattvas.
- ❁ Bhiksu Dharmakara also vowed to become a Buddha who surpassed all other Buddhas. He asked Buddha Lokesvara if he would be able to accomplish these vows. Buddha Lokesvara replied with an example: “If a person tries to scoop up the water from the ocean through many eons, he will dry up the water and see the bottom. With perseverance and sincerity what wish is there that he cannot fulfill?” If one is truly determined, one can achieve any goal.
- ❁ What is the sincere mind? A mind without wandering thoughts. One who has such a mind will be awakened listening to Dharma talks.
- ❁ Today we feel unhappy and suffer hardships because our minds are impure, discriminating, and deluded.
- ❁ Great Master Qingliang stated in his commentary on the *Avatamsaka Sutra*, that one who has not yet severed one’s afflictions or become awakened, will find his or her extensive knowledge leads to erroneous viewpoints. It is essential to be balanced in both cultivation and understanding.
- ❁ A Dharma lecturer who does not cultivate often will have erroneous thoughts and viewpoints, and will therefore mislead others. This person uses his or her own viewpoints, which distort the Buddha’s teachings into worldly viewpoints.

- ❁ Lokesvara Buddha did not directly answer Bhiksu Dharmakara's question as to whether or not he would be able to accomplish his vows. Rather, he asked Bhiksu Dharmakara to contemplate which expedient way to cultivate and thus accomplish the adornment of the Buddhaland.
- ❁ When our minds are pure, non-discriminatory, and awakened, the Buddha and we are of one mind for that split second. However, once our minds revert to greed, anger, ignorance, and arrogance, we are again mortal. Buddhas have the ability to maintain their pure state at all times.
- ❁ Bhiksu Dharmakara's roots of goodness, wisdom, virtue, and learning surpassed all the others, enabling him to know how to accomplish his vows. Given only a hint, he would instantly understand all.
- ❁ All the Buddhas establish their own Buddhlands by their respective vows.
- ❁ Some Buddhas choose to go to impure worlds, like Buddha Shakyamuni choosing to help the sentient beings in this Saha world. Other Buddhas choose a pure world. Therefore, Bhiksu Dharmakara would make his own choice.
- ❁ Amitabha Buddha had already become a Buddha infinite eons ago, not just the ten stated in the sutra. He is very compassionate, pretending to know nothing so that Buddha Lokesvara would have the opportunity to give him a detailed explanation, thus allowing us to hear the sutra.
- ❁ Bhiksu Dharmakara responded: "Such principles are vast and profound, it is not the state of my own can perceive. I entreat the Thus Come One, with the request to be recognizable by all, to broadly proclaim and manifest to me the measureless,

wonderful lands of all Buddhas. When I hear and see such Dharmas, I will contemplate, practice, and determine to fulfill my vows.”

- ❁ The goal of ancient Chinese education was to teach the students to treat everyone with proper manners. Only when one has clear understanding of the relationships between father and son, between siblings, between friends, and between co-workers, and knows how to cultivate one’s virtue, will one know how to be an honorable person, and thus know how to get along harmoniously with others. Knowing this will ensure one a happy family, a harmonious society, a strong nation, and a peaceful world.
- ❁ Morality and proper conduct are the first priority of Confucian education. If a student does not possess these qualities, a wise teacher will try to correct the faults before proceeding with the teaching. This is to prevent the student from gaining any ability to harm society.
- ❁ Lokeshvara Buddha knew that Bhiksu Dharmakara was decent and virtuous, intelligent and wise, and had a great compassionate vow. Therefore, to comply with his wish, the Buddha described and showed to him the merits, virtues, and adornment of all the twenty one billion Buddhalands. Twenty-one is a symbolic number in the Esoteric school symbolizing complete perfection.
- ❁ When the Zen patriarch Bodhidharma met Emperor Wu in China, he found the emperor very proud of himself. The emperor said, “I have already accomplished many good deeds in the name of Buddhism. I have established four hundred and eighty Buddhist temples, and helped hundreds of thousands of people to become ordained. How great is my merit from all of this?” Bodhidharma honestly replied, “No merit at all.” If the

emperor had asked instead, “How great is my good fortune from all this?” Bodhidharma would have answered, “Very great indeed!”

- ❁ Nowadays, many people misunderstand the difference between merit and good fortune. They think that simply donating money will gain much merit. Actually, this only brings good fortune. Merit is gained through one’s practice by observing the precepts, cultivating concentration, and attaining wisdom. Merit cannot be bought.
- ❁ When we are ignorant of our faults and others tell us, we would do well to correct them as soon as possible. This is precept observation. Precept observation does not just include observing precepts in the Buddhist sutras but also following the advice of teachers, parents, and friends.
- ❁ Our countenance can be changed by our thoughts. If we are kind and gentle, our face will become kindhearted. If we are cruel and malicious, our face will become harsh looking. We bear the responsibility for our features after the age of forty; they are no longer solely what we were born with.
- ❁ Fortune-tellers have a saying: “A fortunate land is inhabited by people with good fortune and vice versa.” If a person with less good fortune lived in a fortunate area, this person would soon feel uncomfortable and would want to move away. Thus, it is important to cultivate good fortune.
- ❁ The Buddha is the honored one complete with two perfections: wisdom and good fortune.
- ❁ It is recommended that a practitioner spend at least ten years studying just one sutra to truly master it. If one studies ten sutras in ten years, one will barely skim their surface.

- ❁ Good students are those who spend ten years mastering one sutra, then two to three years on the second sutra, next half a year on the third, and finally one to two months on the fourth. The deeper one delves into the first sutra, the more concentration one achieves, thus building a strong foundation. Once one deeply comprehends one sutra, it takes less time to learn a new one.
- ❁ In the beginning of their practice, the teacher instructs the students to concentrate only on sutras of their selected school and not on those of other schools. This is to cultivate concentration in order to attain the pure mind. When the first step is achieved, one may continue to develop comprehensive learning.
- ❁ The four studies of Confucian teachings are virtue, speech, skills to earn a living, and finally, the arts. It is important for one to learn them in their respective order.
- ❁ There is an ancient Chinese saying: “The tongue is the gate leading to good fortune or misfortune throughout one’s life.” Beware of careless speech for it can easily hurt others, unexpectedly causing resentment in them and bringing reprisals to the speaker. Thus, it is important to learn appropriate speech.
- ❁ During that time, Buddha Lokesvara was very patient in giving instructions for one hundred billion years, and Bhiksu Dharmakara was equally patient in learning tirelessly. It took that long to thoroughly view and analyze all the Buddhalands in the ten directions. This illustrates that patience in learning is the key to success.
- ❁ Taking something without permission is stealing. Of course, if one steals from others, one will have to pay them back

someday. If one steals the possession of another, he or she only owes that person. If one steals city property; for example, a public telephone installed by the city, then he or she owes the citizens of that city. If the property belongs to the country, then he or she owes the citizens of that country. Property in temples belongs to sentient beings in the infinite universe, so if one steals from temples, then he or she owes infinite beings in the ten directions thus leading one to the Avici Hell [the lowest of the eight burning hells].

- ❁ Amitabha Buddha's unsurpassable forty-eight vows were generated gradually during Dharmakara's hundred billion years of study and five eons of cultivation. He condensed and perfected all that he learned from his study and cultivation of the Buddhlands in the ten directions to create the ideal land without any negative elements.
- ❁ When Amitabha Buddha made his selections to create his land, he used a single mind, a true mind without wandering, discriminating, attaching, or deluded thoughts. With this true mind, every single choice would be perfect.
- ❁ Good choices are made when one's mind is truly at peace.
- ❁ A true Pure Land cultivator chants the Buddha's name with a sincere and pure mind. It is said in sutras that no bad spirits would dare to come within forty miles of a true cultivator. When one's body and mind are pure, Amitabha Buddha and all other Buddhas and Bodhisattvas will care for and protect this person.
- ❁ One should be ashamed of one's lack of cultivation if the spirits often come and make fun of oneself. Most likely, it indicates that the cultivator is not practicing in accordance with the teachings.

- ❁ One is not practicing in accordance with the Buddha's teachings if one chants the Buddha's name or recites the sutra while still harboring doubt, unable to let go of fame, wealth, or desire. No matter how much one cultivates, all the efforts will be futile if one still attaches to greed, anger, ignorance, or arrogance, and discriminates between right or wrong, or yours or mine, and has nothing to do with purity, equality, and awakening,
- ❁ In our daily lives, it is necessary to practice even tiny good deeds, for an accumulation of these will make a great deed. Likewise, one would do well to be aware of even trivial faults and correct them, for many trivial faults add up to a big one. One needs to start small in severing misdeeds and accumulating good ones.
- ❁ True cultivation starts at the place where thoughts arise.
- ❁ The principle that one needs to follow in passing on the Buddha's teachings to others is to accord with conditions and not to purposely seek opportunities. If opportunities do not arise, we do not seek or force them. If we have an idea to create an opportunity, our mind will not be calm or pure, nor will it accord with the teachings.
- ❁ One waits for the opportunity to spontaneously arise. If it is not yet the right time, then we just diligently cultivate.
- ❁ Never try to purposely seek out an opportunity, but when the opportunity arises, one needs to do one's best in accomplishing it.
- ❁ Many practitioners, who were formerly ill, recovered naturally upon chanting the Buddha's name sincerely.

- ❀ A professor of Tan Chiang University, Taiwan, had a tumor in his head for twenty years. Since the tumor was not very big, he did not worry about it. Recently when the tumor began to grow, the doctor suggested surgery. A practitioner suggested that he chant the name of Guan Yin Bodhisattva instead. After the professor chanted sincerely for four months, the doctor re-examined him and found the tumor was gone. When the mind is pure, the body naturally becomes pure.
- ❀ In the Buddha's teachings, it is more important to have confidence in oneself than to believe in the Buddha. When one loses confidence in oneself, one's true nature is not equal to that of a Buddha. At that point, even Buddhas and Bodhisattvas are unable to help this person. Only when one is determined and has complete confidence in oneself, will Buddhas and Bodhisattvas truly be able to help.
- ❀ Many people's beliefs are easily shaken by the persuasion of people from other schools. This indicates that they lack self-confidence and are easily misled.
- ❀ With his achievement in having created the Pure Land, Bhiksu Dharmakara circled, prostrated, and reported to the Buddha, with palms together in a respectful and sincere manner. Not only was he respectful toward his teacher, but to all the Buddhas of the ten directions in the past, present, and future as well.
- ❀ Some people become arrogant as they learn more about Buddhism. What they really learned is not Buddhism, but delusion. All true practitioners of Buddhism have respect for their teachers. The relationship of teacher and student is like that of parent and child. Regardless of how much time the teacher spends with us, we should never forget his or her kindness in helping to correct our faults, thus enabling us to

cease doing bad deeds and to practice good ones. This is true education.

- ❁ Bhiksu Dharmakara reported his achievement to his teacher. The Buddha answered: “Excellent! Now is the time for you to speak it all and let living beings rejoice with you. You should also let the living beings hear such a Dharma and obtain great benefit. They should be able to cultivate, gather themselves in your Buddhaland, and fulfill the measureless great vows of Buddhas and those living beings.”
- ❁ Lokesvara Buddha and Bhiksu Dharmakara portrayed the best role models for teacher and student. When this student’s vows surpassed those of his teacher, the former showed neither resentment nor jealousy but praised his student’s accomplishment and sent his other students to learn from him. From this, we can see the depth of Lokesvara Buddha’s sincerity and unselfishness.
- ❁ Every Buddha’s objective is for all beings to become Buddhas as soon as possible. Yet, the karmic obstacles of sentient beings are so great that they block themselves from attaining Buddhahood.
- ❁ The Western Pure Land created by Amitabha Buddha provides the best opportunity for those with great karmic obstacles to become a Buddha.
- ❁ The true meaning of great benefit is to equally enable all beings of the nine realms of all Buddhlands of the ten directions to gain true liberation. This is not only the fundamental vow of Amitabha Buddha, but of all Buddhas.

Chapter Six

The Initiation of the Great Vows

- ❁ The following forty-eight great vows were presented to Lokeshvara Buddha by Bhikshu Dharmakara, and told to us by Shakyamuni Buddha. These vows tell how one can be reborn into the Western Pure Land, the physical characteristics of this pure land, and the benefits of being born there.
- ❁ Having already gone through different phases of cultivation, Bhikshu Dharmakara achieved Buddhahood ten eons ago. This means that every one of his vows has been fulfilled, the criteria for becoming a Buddha.
- ❁ Bhikshu Dharmakara then said: “I wish the World Honored One, could listen to me carefully and examine my sincerity with great compassion.”
- ❁ The first great vow is “No bad realm in the Western Pure Land.” The Western Pure Land is a place filled with unimaginable magnificence. There are no bad realms of animal, hungry ghost, or hell. The beings in that land have met the requirement of achieving the Ten Good Conducts.
- ❁ Why the Ten Good Conducts? Because the Western Pure Land has no three bad realms of existence. Even if one chants Amitabha Buddha’s name while committing the Ten Bad Conducts, one will not go to Western Pure Land because the vows and the conduct do not harmonize.
- ❁ Shakyamuni Buddha taught the Three Conditions in the *Visualization Sutra*. The Ten Good Conducts are part of this foundation upon which Pure Land practitioners build their practice. After one has firmly established this foundation, one will be in harmony with Amitabha Buddha when chanting his

name and, therefore, will definitely reach the Pure Land.

- ❁ Upon this foundation, one also establishes unwavering belief, the great vow, and practice. We can reflect within to see whether our behavior accords with Amitabha Buddha's mind and vows. The sutras reveal how to chant and what kind of attitude one adopts. Buddha Name Chanting is daily living; it is the manner one assumes throughout the day. Proper interaction with others and circumstances are accomplished with the pure mind, the mind with infinite awakening without delusion, in one word—Amitabha.
- ❁ Bhiksu Dharmakara gave rise to the first vow after witnessing the sufferings that the beings in the worlds of ten directions have to endure, thus creating a Buddhaland absent of suffering.
- ❁ The second great vow is “One will not regress into the bad realms.” Upon reaching the Western Pure Land, all beings will attain Buddhahood in one lifetime—even those in hell who have suffered the most. Once in the Pure Land they will again never fall back into the three bad realms.
- ❁ In other Buddhalands, cultivation is mixed with progress and regression. One who has committed bad deeds, upon encountering appropriate conditions will retrogress and fall back into the lower realms. Therefore, logically it could take as long as three large Asankhya eons for one to become a Buddha in other Buddhalands.
- ❁ In the Western Pure Land, everyone possesses infinite life. That is why it only takes the beings there one lifetime to become a Buddha. They can also go to any other worlds in whatever form needed to help all beings advance on the path to enlightenment.
- ❁ The appearance of Ksitigarbha Bodhisattva that we are used to

seeing is not the true appearance. Ksitigarbha Bodhisattva manifests in hell, which requires a form similar to the inhabitants there. Naturally, to us it would be terrifying. For a Bodhisattva to be able to help beings in the ghost realm, he would need to manifest as a hungry ghost to be accepted. Whichever realm one needs to be in will determine the form that accords with the beings in that realm.

- ❁ The first two vows, like all those that follow, had to be fulfilled in order for Bhikṣu Dharmakara to become a Buddha. Since he is now a Buddha, we see that he has accomplished his vows made to all beings and established his own world.
- ❁ The third great vow is “All will have the same body color of pure gold.” All beings born into the Western Pure Land will possess a body the color of genuine gold and be identical to Amitabha Buddha. This is unlike other pure lands where the Buddha of that land and the sentient beings who dwell there do not possess the same appearance.
- ❁ The fourth great vow is “All will possess the thirty-two marks of a great being.” Thirty-two marks and eighty signs are regarded as the best countenance in our world. In actuality, Amitabha Buddha possesses infinite marks and signs. Birth into the Western Pure Land ensures that everyone will possess the same magnificent features as Amitabha Buddha.
- ❁ To be born into the Pure Land, one needs to cultivate the non-discriminating mind and use this mind in interacting with others and situations. The pure, non-discriminatory, and awakening mind is Amitabha Buddha at that moment.
- ❁ The fifth great vow is “All will have the same appearance.” Inequality often results in transgressions. For example, beautiful people can become egotistical and the less fortunate

can become self-pitying. To create a world where everyone is equal can help eliminate these problems. In the Western Pure Land, it begins first with the way one looks; all have the same appearance.

- ❁ All beings in the Western Pure Land are identical to Amitabha Buddha. If there was any difference between them, then Amitabha Buddha could not have attained his Buddhahood.
- ❁ Cultivating a non-discriminatory mind provides the serenity for practitioners to let go of afflictions, wandering thoughts, and attachments. It is difficult for most people to let go due to the injustices they feel they have suffered and the resultant grudges. However, feeling this way only puts one at more of a disadvantage because then we suffer the consequences of our grudges. Inequalities exist in this world because of our discriminating mind.
- ❁ The sixth great vow is “All will have the extraordinary ability of the recollection of past lives.” When one reaches the Western Pure Land, they have regained their innate abilities of the Six Senses. Their ability is almost as great as that of Amitabha Buddha. This is due to the empowerment from Amitabha’s great vow that endows one with the ability to know his past lives for the innumerable eons.
- ❁ The ability to know all one’s past lives for innumerable eons usually belongs to the great Bodhisattvas who have accomplished the eighth ground or higher. However, the beings in the Western Pure Land, even those of the lowest level of rebirth, also attain this ability and more.
- ❁ With this ability whatever deeds one has done before in past incalculable eons, whether good or bad, will be reflected in one’s mind as clearly as in a mirror.

- ❁ The seventh great vow is “All will have the extraordinary ability of clairvoyance.” A Bodhisattva’s seeing from one to many Buddhalands varies according to their ability. A person in the Western Pure Land can clearly see all the Buddhalands, exceeding the ability of some Bodhisattvas in other pure lands.
- ❁ The eighth great vow is “All will have the extraordinary ability of clairaudience.” Any movement, whisper, or thought can be detected by the beings in the Western Pure Land, regardless of where one is in the universe. This reminds Pure Land practitioners to be vigilant in disciplining oneself.
- ❁ There are six extraordinary abilities. Usually the most that can be gained through the practice of meditation is five. The remaining one that severs afflictions and transcends rebirth can be gained at the level of Arhats.
- ❁ A dedicated practitioner can secure rebirth into the Pure Land in as few as three to five years of practice. This is due to the great benefits from Amitabha Buddha’s inconceivable extraordinary ability and great vows.
- ❁ Beings in the Western Pure Land are destined to have extraordinary abilities through Amitabha Buddha’s great compassion and vows, not just from one’s practice. An analogy would be of a person who is born into a royal family and who is thus destined to be a prince and heir to the throne.
- ❁ The ninth great vow is “All will have the extraordinary ability of understanding the mind of others.” Even a being’s single thought can be immediately known by the beings in the Western Pure Land.
- ❁ Birth into the Pure Land is a matter of transforming one’s pure mind; it has nothing to do with one’s body. How would

the mind be considered pure? Any wandering thought would render the mind impure. What is a wandering thought? Actually, any thought not of Amitabha Buddha is a wandering thought.

- ❁ “Amitabha” is a thought that arises from correct thinking. Once it is grasped sincerely and firmly in one’s mind, even for a period as short as three years, it can result in rebirth into the Western Pure Land. Some people can predict when they will pass on from this world. At the time of death, some are in a standing or sitting position, others can see Amitabha Buddha coming to escort them.
- ❁ If during our mindfulness of Amitabha Buddha even a single thought of gossip arises, this dedicated practice will have been in vain.
- ❁ When one is contemplating Amitabha Buddha or reciting the sutra while thinking of conflicts, gossip, rights and wrongs, one is still creating karma. Then, no matter how many infinite eons one chants, one cannot reach the Pure Land, due to this inability to let go. We may think, “I’ll just wait till my next life.” Actually, whether one will be able to obtain a human life and then to encounter Buddhism is highly questionable. We have already passed up an unknown number of opportunities like this one.
- ❁ The tenth great vow is “All will have the extraordinary ability of physical feats.” This allows one to transform one’s body at will. With this ability, the beings in the Western Pure Land can visit numerous Buddhas in the ten directions in a moment of thought.
- ❁ Once in the Pure Land, all possess great extraordinary abilities, which are abilities that enable one to truly take care

of one's family still mired in samsara. One will know how they are doing as well as when would be the right time to help them.

- ❁ The eleventh great vow is “All will have the ability of making offerings extensively to all Buddhas.” Instead of traveling abroad, it would be more worthwhile to stay home and contemplate Amitabha Buddha constantly. Because once rebirth in the Pure Land is attained, one can travel to numerous Buddhalands in a moment while making offerings to all.
- ❁ The sixth to the eleventh great vows concern the recovery of our original abilities.
- ❁ The twelfth great vow is “All will obtain Perfect, Complete Enlightenment.” None of the beings in the Western Pure Land have the mind of discrimination. Instead, they know everything through “seeing from the illumination of the mind.” They will know everything clearly with the true wisdom of the mind.
- ❁ The six sense organs are eye, ear, nose, tongue, body, and mind. The senses of the beings in the Western Pure Land are tranquil because they have no discrimination, possessing the abilities of great Bodhisattva beyond the seventh ground.
- ❁ The thirteenth great vow is “All will possess immeasurable light” and the fourteenth is “All will be comfortably joyous when shone on by Amitabha Buddha's light.” Light represents wisdom and the infinite space that it shines throughout. Usually the area a Buddha teaches is a one-large-thousand world system. However, Amitabha Buddha's light can go beyond that limit which means that he teaches in all the Buddhalands.

- ❁ Amitabha Buddha's light surpasses the brilliance of the sun and moon by thousands of millions of times. This light continuously shines on us but our karmic obstructions prevent us from seeing it, like a person holding an umbrella to keep sun from shining on one.
- ❁ When our mind is at its purest, we will recover our innate abilities and be able to hear the quietest sounds and see the least visible light.