PURE LAND BUDDHISM

Dialogues with Ancient Masters

Pure Land Buddhism

Dialogues with Ancient Masters

Patriarch Chih I & Master T'ien Ju
translated with annotations by
Master Thích Thiền Tâm

Sutra Translation Committee of
The United States and Canada
New York - 1992

This book is a translation of two Chinese commentaries from the *Tripitaka,* a compilation of all major texts of the Buddhist Canon. The Chinese titles are *Ching-t'u Shih-i-Lun* and *Ching-t'u Huo-wen.* The Vietnamese version, which includes both texts, is entitled *Tịnh-Độ Thập-Nghi Luận.*

Third Edition: 1992

Sutra Translation Committee of the United States and Canada

Dharma Master Lok To, Director
2611 Davidson Ave.
Bronx, N.Y. 10468 (USA)
Tel. (212) 584-0621

Reprinted and donated for free distribution by

The Corporate Body of the Buddha Educational Foundation

11F., 55 Hang Chow South Road Sec 1, Taipei, Taiwan, R.O.C.

Tel: 886-2-23951198 , Fax: 886-2-23913415

This book is strict for free distribution, it is not to be sold.

Other books in the Pure Land series:

- *Buddhism of Wisdom and Faith:*
  Pure Land Principles and Practice

- *Pure-Land Zen, Zen Pure-Land:*
  Letters of a Pure Land Patriarch

SUTRA TRANSLATION COMMITTEE OF THE UNITED STATES AND CANADA

BUDDHIST ASSOCIATION OF CANADA
CHAM SHAN TEMPLE
7245 BAYVIEW AVENUE
THORNHILL, ONTARIO, CANADA L3T 2R6

BUDDHIST ASSOCIATION OF SAN FRANCISCO
5230 FULTON STREET
SAN FRANCISCO, CALIFORNIA 94121

YOUNG MEN'S BUDDHIST ASSOCIATION OF AMERICA
2611 DAVIDSON AVENUE
BRONX, NEW YORK 10468

NAME OF SPONSOR

助印功德芳名

Document Serial No : 90076

委印文號: 90076

U.S.Dollars：

1,000：沈祚英。

N.T.Dollars：

10,000：陳怡君。

269,285：佛陀教育基金會。

Total: U.S. Dollars 1,000，N.T. Dollars 279,285，

12,000 copies.

以上合計：美金 1,000 元，新台幣 279,285 元，

恭印 12,000 冊。

DEDICATION OF MERIT

May the merit and virtue
accrued from this work
adorn the Buddha's Pure Land,
repay the four great kindnesses above,
and relieve the suffering of
those on the three paths below.

May those who see or hear of these efforts
generate Bodhi-mind,
spend their lives devoted to the Buddha Dharma,
and finally be reborn together in
the Land of Ultimate Bliss.
Homage to Amita Buddha!

NAMO AMITABHA

南無阿彌陀佛

Printed for free distribution by
The Corporate Body of the Buddha Educational Foundation
11F., 55 Hang Chow South Road Sec 1, Taipei, Taiwan, R.O.C.
Tel: 886-2-23951198 , Fax: 886-2-23913415
Email: overseas@budaedu.org.tw
Website: http: //www.budaedu.org.tw
This book is strictly for free distribution, it is not to be sold.
Printed in Taiwan
12000 copies; July 2001
EN059-2537

The supreme and endless blessings
of Samantabhadra's deeds,
I now universally transfer.
May every living being, drowning
and adrift,
Soon return to the Land of Limitless
Light!

"The Vows of Samantabhadra"
Avatamsaka Sutra, Chap. 40

About the Authors

Chih I (Patriarch) Also known as T'ien T'ai, Chih K'ai or Chih Che. The Patriarch Chih I (538-597) was one of China's greatest Buddhist thinkers and the founder of the T'ien T'ai or Lotus Sutra School. The Master's name and title are taken from Mount T'ien T'ai (Che Chiang Province), where he lived and preached. His life coincided with the beginning of what is known as the Golden Age of Pure Land doctrinal development (6th to 9th centuries).

Chih I has been described by D.T. Suzuki as one of the greatest Buddhist philosophers of all times, on a par with the Sixth Patriarch of Zen: "Hui-Neng's accomplishment in the way of Zen intuition equals, indeed, its its cultural value that of Chih-i and Fa-tsang [Third Patriarch of the Avatamsaka School], both of whom are minds of the highest order, not only in China but in the whole world."

In addition to his commentaries on the T'ien T'ai doctrine, Master Chih I authored at least four treatises on Pure Land, as recorded in the *Tripitaka*, the best known of which is translated herewith under the title *Ten*

Doubts about Pure Land. Thus, the close parallels and fundamental identity between T'ien T'ai and Pure Land were firmly established -- broadening the philosophical base of Pure Land in East Asia.

T'ien Ju A well-known Zen Master of the 14th century. He was a disciple of National Master Chung Feng (the highest ranking Zen Master of his day) and lived and preached in the fertile Yangtze Valley of Central China. Master T'ien Ju was the author of a commentary on the *Surangama Sutra*, a key text followed by monks and nuns, especially Zen practitioners. The Master had many followers during the Yuan and Ming dynasties. His treatise *Doubts and Questions about Pure Land*, translated herewith, underscores the similarities and basic unity of Pure Land and Zen.

Thích Thiền Tâm. Also known as Liên Du. Dharma Master Thích Thiền Tâm (contemporary) specializes in both the Pure Land and Esoteric traditions. His best known treatise, *Niệm Phật Thập Yếu*, is available in English under the title *Buddhism of Wisdom and Faith.*

Diệu Phụng
Minh Thành, MA, MBA
P.D. Leigh, BA, MS

Contents

* Preface
1 Introduction: Pure Land School
5 Note on the Text

Translations:

7 Part I: **T'ien T'ai Patriarch Chih I**
Ten Doubts about Pure Land

37 Part II: **Elder Zen Master T'ien Ju**
Doubts and Questions about Pure Land

111 Part III. Appendix: **Master T.Thiền Tâm**
Buddhism of Wisdom and Faith (excerpts)

- Doubts on Misreading the Sutras 113
- Caveats: Demons of the Mind 126

153 Editors' Notes
185 Editors' Glossary
205 Bibliography
209 Index

Acknowledgements (Third edition)

We acknowledge our debts to numerous good spiritual advisors without whom this book could not have been completed. Heading the list are Dharma Master Lok To of the Sutra Translation Committee of the United States and Canada (Bronx, N.Y.) and Dharma Master Thích Đức Niệm of the International Buddhist Monastic Institute (Sepulveda, California). Their encouragement, exhortations, review of the text and clarification of important points of doctrine were crucial to this translation. Upasaka Larsen Raleigh, Dương Đình Hỹ, Dimitri, Lê Quang Thông and Upasika Liên Smith went through all or part of the text and provided salient comments and feedback.

Our thanks also go to Upasaka Lee Tsu-ku, whose cheerful assistance in the reprinting of the first work in this series encouraged us to complete this second book swiftly. The late Mrs. Fong-ying Cheung, too, is remembered for her moral support. Finally, Upasaka Bruce Kou and Joseph Levine, along with Upasika Barbara Levine, took time out to help at a crucial stage in the production of this book. The assistance they freely gave to a stranger adds particular significance to the word "kalyanamitra" -- virtuous friends!

For this second edition, we gratefully acknowledge the help of Upasaka Dương Đình Hỹ for comparing the translated text against the Chinese original, Dr. Fang Wong and the artist C.S. Leung for providing the calligraphy, as well as the assistance, in alphabetical order, of Cheng Chien Bhikshu, Upasaka Collin Clarke, Upasaka Thomas Leung and Rev. Kenryu T. Tsuji. To all of them we say Thank you ... O-kage-sama!

On their path to Buddhahood, "within" and "beyond" this wasteland of birth and death, may they, together with all sentient beings, be reborn in Sukhavati -- in that far land beyond, in their own pure Minds ...

Preface to the Third Edition

Buddhism, as a major religion and a way of life, is the subject of numerous books and commentaries. Yet the kernel of its teachings can be expressed in two major concepts: *purity of Mind* and *practice*.

Traditional Pure Land teachings emphasize the three elements of Faith, Vows and Practice (Buddha Recitation) as the essential conditions for rebirth in the Pure Land -- in the *Pure Mind.* This approach is presented as the easiest, most expedient path for the majority of people in this day and age.

These teachings are in harmony with other Pure Land traditions, such as Jodo Shinshu, in which *shinjin*, Faith, is ultimately defined as Mind -- the *True Mind*, encompassing Vows and Practice (*Sanshin Isshin*).

Pure Land is also in line with Zen, which sees all teachings as expedients, "fingers pointing to the moon" -- the moon being the *True Mind*, the Mind of Thusness, always bright, pure and unchanging.

In the same vein, the *Dhammapada Sutra*, a key text of the Theravada School, summarizes the teachings of the Buddha with the words: "Do not what is evil. Do what is good. *Keep your Mind pure.*

Yet, purity of Mind cannot be achieved by study and verbalization alone. It can be attained only through determined *practice*.

There is a story concerning the famous Chinese official and poet Po Chu-i which illustrates this point. One day, the official, passing along the road, saw a Zen monk seated on the branch of a tree preaching the Dharma. The following dialogue ensued:

Official: "Old man, what are you doing in that tree, in such a precarious position? One misstep, and you will fall to your death!"

Monk: "I dare say, Your Lordship, that your own position is even more precarious. If I make a misstep, I alone may be killed; if you make a misstep, it can cost the lives of thousands."

Official: "Not a bad reply. I'll tell you what. If you can explain the essence of Buddhism to me in one sentence, I'll become your disciple. Otherwise, we will go our separate ways, never to meet again."

Monk: "What an easy question! Listen! The essence of Buddhism is to do no evil, do what is good, and keep your Mind pure."

Official: "Is that all there is to it? Even a child of eight realizes that!"

Monk: "True, a child of eight may realize it, but, even a man of eighty cannot practice it!"

Buddhism is *Mind*, Buddhism is *practice* -- it is *praxis*.

Introduction

The Pure Land School

Zen, T'ien T'ai and Pure Land are among the best known schools of Buddhism in East Asia. Pure Land, in particular, has the widest appeal.[1] However, unlike Zen and the Tantric School, which have many exponents in the West, Pure Land is little known to Westerners, except, perhaps, in scholarly circles.

This book presents the teachings and major tenets of Pure Land, as seen from the perspective of two major sister schools: Zen and T'ien T'ai (Lotus School).[2] Further insights, from the viewpoint of a contemporary Pure Land Master, are included in the Appendix. The principal teachings of the Pure Land School are summarized below, for the benefit of readers.

The goal espoused by all Buddhist schools is for the practitioner to achieve Buddhahood, i.e., to become an "Enlightened Being." Thus, to practice Buddhism is to cultivate enlightenment, to attain Wisdom.

Although there are many paths to reach this goal, they all involve severing greed, anger and delusion, thus perfecting the qualities of the Mind ("paramitas"). Traditionally, Buddhist sutras enumerate six or ten paramitas, but they may be reduced to three: *Discipline*,

Concentration and *Wisdom* (the second, fifth and sixth paramitas, respectively).[3]

Pure Land, or Buddha Recitation, is a Mahayana approach that employs, *inter alia,* the techniques of meditation/visualization (of the Pure Land, Amitabha Buddha ...) and of oral recitation of the Buddha's name, to realize these paramitas.[4]

That is, when a practitioner is busy visualizing the Buddha[5] or reciting the Buddha's name, he cannot commit transgressions or violate the Buddhist precepts. Therefore, he has effectively fulfilled the paramita of Discipline. Likewise, reciting the Buddha's name with a completely focussed Mind is nothing less than fulfilling the paramita of Concentration. Once Concentration is achieved, the practitioner's Mind becomes empty and still, leading to the emergence of his innate wisdom -- the Wisdom of the Buddhas.[6]

Thus, a Buddha Recitation practitioner, by dint of his own effort, effectively attains Buddhahood. This is a simple, straightforward alternative[7] to strict monastic ascetism (Theravada School),[8] deep and extensive study of the Buddhist Canon (Sutra Studies School), esoteric yogic practices, ceremonies and services (Tantric School)[9] or intensive meditation under the personal instruction of highly competent mentors (Zen).[10]

According to Pure Land doctrine, however, most practitioners in this Degenerate Age[11] find the "self-power," self-help appproach too difficult and arduous; therefore, in their Pure Land teachings, the Buddhas and Sages compassionately emphasized the additional element of "other-power."[12] This involves reliance on the Vows of Amitabha Buddha, made countless eons ago, to welcome and escort all sentient beings to his Land of Ultimate Bliss[13] -- an ideal training

ground, an ideal environment.[14] Once this "Land" is reached and training completed, the practitioner will naturally discover that "training is no training" and that the training ground, the Pure Land, is Mind-Only. Rebirth at the time of death is rebirth within our own Mind.[15]

Thus, to the Pure Land advocate, this approach, grounded in wisdom and faith, is profound yet simple, and can be practiced at any time, anywhere, under any circumstances, with no special training or guidance. It is, therefore, infinitely adaptable to practitioners at all levels of intellectual and spiritual development.[16]

When earlier drafts of this manuscript were circulated for comments, the editor was asked a number of pointed questions. The answers gleaned from the book are summarized below.

i) Is not Pure Land teaching too close to traditional Western beliefs in a personal God, saints, sinners and Paradise? *Answer.* A person asleep and dreaming finds the scenes in his dreams very real; these scenes exist for him. Likewise, the Pure Land, saints, sinners, everything "exists" at the mundane level, albeit in an *illusory, dream-like* way.[17] At the absolute level, however, everything, including the Pure Land and Amitabha Buddha, is Mind-Only, a product of our Mind.[18] This key Mahayana teaching is reflected in the paradox "True Emptiness Wonderful Existence!"[19]

ii) Is not Pure Land teaching contrary to the fundamental principle of Buddhism, the Law of Karma? *Answer.* The Law of Cause and Effect underlies all of our actions and thoughts. However, in Mahayana thinking, cause, effect, karma ..., all phenomena are intrinsically empty and devoid of true nature.[20]

Therefore, they are infinitely subject to change. Just as a small flame can destroy a pile of wood as high as a mountain, a perfect thought of Buddha Recitation can destroy eons of bad karma, resulting in the practitioner's rebirth in the Pure Land.

iii) Pure Land is practiced with a grasping Mind, unlike Zen or cultivation of the paramitas. *Answer.* When Buddha Recitation is practiced with one-pointedness of Mind, *at that moment*, there is "no practitioner, no Buddha, no practice."[21] It is therefore identical to Zen or the practice of the paramitas.[22]

iv) Pure Land is so boring! *Answer.* The Buddha taught 84,000 Dharma Doors.[23] Each of them is a medicine for a given sickness at a given time, and each, as a first signpost of success, provides the practitioner with a sense of well-being and joy ...[24] Pure Land is obviously not for you. You might try Theravada or Zen!

Through the teachings of Pure Land, the words of the Buddha may become more relevant to an even wider spectrum of Western society, particularly the average man in the street.[25] The latter, while not averse to the intellectual-self-power dimension[26] of Zen and other meditational approaches, may also long for the comfort of such "quasi-establishment" beliefs as Amitabha Buddha -- not as creator God, but as benevolent teacher,[27] or the Pure Land -- not as Paradise, but as a steppingstone toward Ultimate Enlightenment. Thus, in the words of Elder Zen Master T'ien Ju, "There are no dharmas outside Mind, no Mind outside of dharmas. You should make no mistake about this!"[28]

Note on the Text

Some people misunderstand the Pure Land method, believing it to be entirely focussed on practice and devoid of philosophical teaching. That is, in the Pure Land sutras, Sakyamuni Buddha simply describes and explains the Western Pure Land and exhorts everyone to recite the Buddha's name, seeking rebirth in that Land -- without reference to theoretical issues.

In truth, however, theory leads to practice, within practice is hidden the element of theory. Moreover, although the Buddha's teachings are classified under different headings, such as the Door of Emptiness [Zen, etc.], the Door of Existence [Pure Land, etc.] , the "Open" Teaching, the "Secret" [Tantric, etc.] Teaching, they all lean toward, rely on and clarify one another.

Thus, there is the Zen School, in which a single meditation riddle (kung an) contains innumerable Dharma teachings. The same is true of Pure Land: the words "Amitabha Buddha" encompass the teachings of Zen, the Sutra Studies School, the Discipline School and the Esoteric School.* Therefore, the ancients have determined that the Pure Land method is a "Sudden Teaching." Elder Master Ou I, a T'ien T'ai Master in the direct lineage of the Patriarchs, has said in this regard:

"A single recitation of the Buddha's name, if done correctly, contains the three thousand auspicious bearings and the eighty thousand subtle conducts. All the various Zen riddles and the most expeditious principles of the Sutra Studies method, are also included."

To demonstrate that Buddha Recitation does indeed encompass wonderful, subtle principles and to clear up the doubts of those who seek to understand and follow Pure Land, this writer is taking the liberty to translate two ancient commentaries, by the Patriarch Chih I and Zen Master T'ien Ju, under the title *Pure Land Buddhism: Dialogues with Ancient Masters.*

This combined text deals, in general, with questions and doubts of a rather subtle nature. Thus, this writer should have added some more general questions. However, because of ill health and other commitments, he must try to do so at a later date.

The contents of this book, except for some clearly indicated additional comments, are the very thoughts and reasoning of renowned ancient Masters. Students of Buddhism can place their faith in these teachings and open up the Pure Land Mysterious Gate.**

Thích Thiền Tâm, Vesak 2509

---

*The statement that the Zen or Pure Land School, etc. encompasses all other teachings should not be construed as mere hyperbole, or at best, an expression of skillful means. Rather, it represents the core teaching of Mahayana Buddhism (every Dharma Door is perfect and complete). This is epitomized in the Avatamsaka School formula of "one in one, one in all, all in one, all in all," or the metaphor of the Jewel Net of Indra:

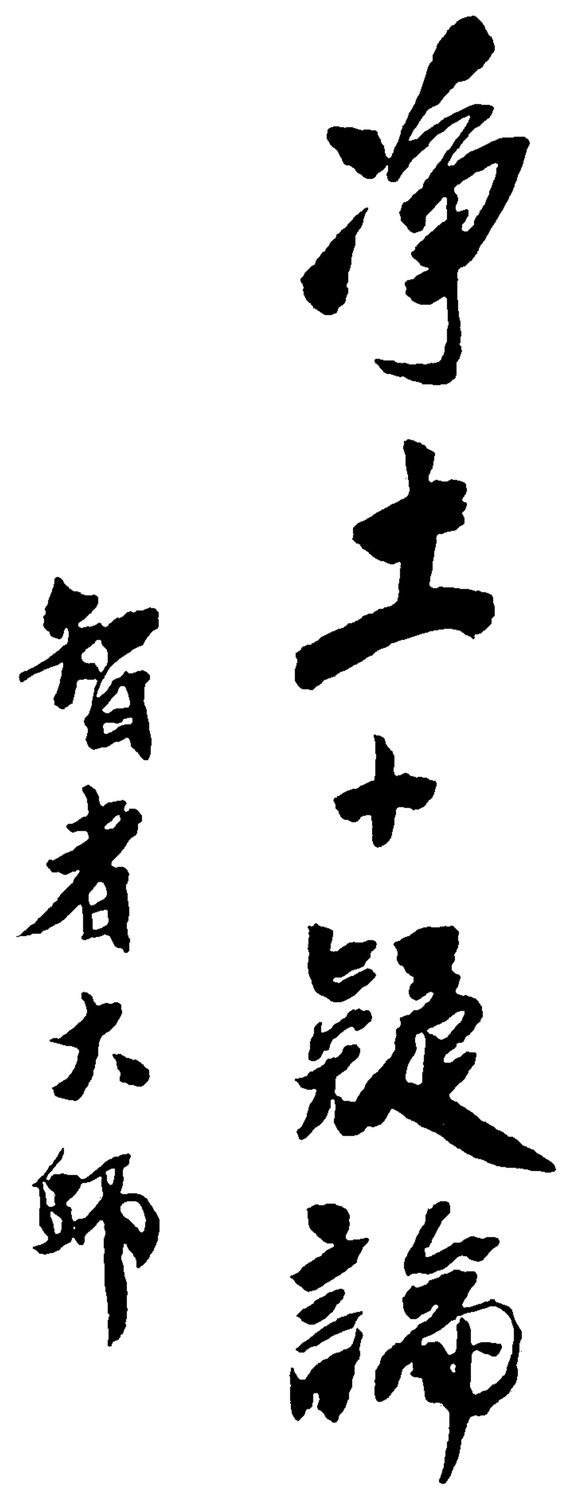
"Fa Tsang says, 'the jewels reflect one another, so that in a single jewel there appear the images of all the rest ... Thus they are multiplied to infinity, and the whole infinity ... appears with vivid clarity in this one jewel.' ... The jewels here symbolize all the various phenomena of the universe, and the implication is that every phenomenon, every single thing, in some sense, embodies the totality of phenomena, and so contains the whole of reality." (A.J. Prince, "The World of Hua-yen Buddhism.")

**This is a reference to the Ten Mysterious Gates (see Glossary).

Ten Doubts about Pure Land

(Ching-t'u Shih-i-lun)

T. 47, No. 1961



T'ien T'ai Patriarch Chih I

On Buddha Recitation and attachment to form:

It is like lighting a fire on top of ice. As the fire intensifies, the ice melts. When the ice melts, the fire is extinguished. So it is with Buddha Recitation ... In the end, the practitioner will attain the realm of No-Birth and see the fire of rebirth spontaneously disappear.

Pure Land Patriarch
Master T'ao Ch'o

Question 1

Great Compassion is the life calling of Buddhas and Bodhisattvas. Thus, those who have developed the Bodhi Mind, wishing to rescue and ferry other sentient beings across, should simply vow to be reborn in the Triple Realm,[29] among the five turbidities and the three evil paths. Why should we abandon sentient beings to lead a selfish life of tranquillity? Is this not a lack of compassion, a preoccupation with egoistic needs, contrary to the path of enlightenment?[30]

Answer

There are two types of Bodhisattvas. The first type are those who have followed the Bodhisattva path for a long time and attained the Tolerance of Non-Birth[31] (insight into the non-origination of phenomena). This reproach applies to them.

The second type are Bodhisattvas who have not attained the Tolerance of Non-Birth, as well as ordinary beings who have just developed the Bodhi Mind.[32] If they aspire to perfect that Tolerance and enter the evil life[33] of the Triple Realm to save sentient beings, they should remain in constant proximity to the Buddhas. As stated in the *Perfection of Wisdom Treatise:*[34]

"It is unwise for human beings who are still bound by all kinds of afflictions, even if they possess a great compassionate Mind, to seek a premature rebirth in this evil realm to rescue sentient beings.

"Why is this so? It is because in this evil, defiled world, afflictions are powerful and widespread. Those who lack the

power of Tolerance [of Non-Birth] are bound to be swayed by external circumstances. They then become slaves to form and sound, fame and fortune, with the resulting karma of greed, anger and delusion. Once this occurs, they cannot even save themselves, much less others!

"If, for example, they are born in the human realm, in this evil environment full of non-believers and externalists, it is difficult to encounter genuine sages. Therefore, it is not easy to hear the Buddha Dharma nor achieve the goals of the sages.

"Of those who planted the seeds of generosity, morality and blessings in previous lives and are thus now enjoying power and fame, how many are not infatuated with a life of wealth and honor, wallowing in endless greed and lust?

"Therefore, even when they are counselled by enlightened teachers, they do not believe them nor act accordingly. Moreover, to satisfy their passions, they take advantage of their existing power and influence, creating a great deal of bad karma. Thus, when their present life comes to an end, they descend upon the three evil paths for countless eons. After that, they are reborn as humans of low social and economic status. If they do not then meet good spiritual advisors, they will continue to be deluded, creating more bad karma and descending once again into the lower realms. From time immemorial, sentient beings caught in the cycle of Birth and Death have been in this predicament. This is called the 'Difficult Path of Practice.'"

The *Vimalakirti Sutra* also states,

"If you cannot even cure your own illness, how can you cure the illnesses of others?"[35]

The *Perfection of Wisdom Treatise* further states:

"Take the case of two persons, each of whom watches a relative drowning in the river. The first person, acting on impulse, hastily jumps into the water. However, because he

lacks the necessary skills, in the end, both of them drown. The second person, more intelligent and resourceful, hurries off to fetch a boat and sails to the rescue. Thus, both persons escape drowning.

"Newly aspiring Bodhisattvas are like the first individual, who still lacks the power of Tolerance [of Non-Birth] and cannot save sentient beings. Only those Bodhisattvas who remain close to the Buddhas and attain that Tolerance can substitute for the Buddhas and ferry countless sentient beings across, just like the person who has the boat."

The *Perfection of Wisdom Treatise* goes on to state:

"This is not unlike a young child who should not leave his mother, lest he fall into a well, drown in the river or die of starvation; or a young bird whose wings are not fully developed. It must bide its time, hopping from branch to branch, until it can fly afar, leisurely and unimpeded.

"Ordinary persons who lack the Tolerance of Non-Birth should limit themselves to Buddha Recitation, to achieve one-pointedness of Mind. Once that goal is reached, at the time of death, they will certainly be reborn in the Pure Land. Having seen Amitabha Buddha and reached the Tolerance of Non-Birth, they can steer the boat of that Tolerance into the sea of Birth and Death, to ferry sentient beings across and accomplish countless Buddha deeds at will."

For these reasons, compassionate practitioners who wish to teach and convert sentient beings in hell, or enter the sea of Birth and Death, should bear in mind the causes and conditions for rebirth in the Pure Land. This is referred to as the "Easy Path of Practice" in the *Commentary on the Ten Stages of the Bodhisattvas.*[36]

Question 2

All phenomena are by nature empty, always unborn

[Non-Birth], equal and still. Are we not going against this truth when we abandon this world, seeking rebirth in the Land of Ultimate Bliss? The [*Vimalakirti*] *Sutra* teaches that "to be reborn in the Pure Land, you should first purify your own Mind; only when the Mind is pure, will the Buddha lands be pure." Are not Pure Land followers going against this truth?

Answer

This question involves two principles and can be answered on two levels.

A) On the level of *generality*, if you think that seeking rebirth in the Pure Land means "leaving here and seeking there," and is therefore incompatible with the Truth of Equal Thusness, are you not committing the same mistake by grasping at this Saha World and not seeking rebirth in the Pure Land, i.e., "leaving there and grasping here"? If, on the other hand, you say, "I am neither seeking rebirth there, nor do I wish to remain here," you fall into the error of nihilism.

The *Diamond Sutra* states in this connection:

"Subhuti, ... do not have such a thought. Why? Because one who develops the Supreme Enlightened Mind does not advocate the [total] annihilation [of the marks of the dharmas.]" (*Bilingual Buddhist Series, Vol. I.* Taipei: Buddhist Cultural Service, 1962, p. 130.)

B) On the level of *Specifics*, since you have brought up the truth of Non-Birth[37] and the Pure Mind, I would like to give the following explanation.

Non-Birth is precisely the truth of No-Birth and No-Death. No-Birth means that all dharmas are false aggregates, born of causes and conditions, with no

Self-Nature. Therefore, they have no real "birth nature" or "time of birth." Upon analysis, they do not really come from anywhere. Therefore, they are said to have No-Birth.

No-Death means that, since phenomena have no Self-Nature, when they are extinguished, they cannot be considered dead. Because they have no real place to return to, they are said to be not extinct (No-Death).

For this reason, the truth of Non-Birth (or No-Birth No-Death) cannot exist outside of ordinary phenomena, which are subject to birth and death. Therefore, Non-Birth does not mean *not* seeking rebirth in the Pure Land.

The *Treatise on the Middle Way* states:

"Dharmas (phenomena) are born of causes and conditions. I say they are thus empty. They are also called false and fictitious, and that is also the truth of the Middle Way."

It also states:

"Dharmas are neither born spontaneously nor do they arise from others. They are born neither together with nor apart from causes and conditions. They are therefore said to have Non-Birth."

The *Vimalakirti Sutra* states:

"Although he knows that Buddha lands / Are void like living beings / He goes on practicing the Pure Land (Dharma) / to teach and convert men." (Charles Luk, *The Vimalakirti Nirdesa Sutra*, p. 88.)

It also states:

"We can build mansions at will on empty land, but it is

impossible to build in the middle of empty space."

When the Buddhas preach, they usually rely on the Two Truths[38] [ultimate and conventional]. They do not destroy the fictitious, provisional identities of phenomena while revealing their true characteristics.

That is why the wise, while earnestly striving for rebirth in the Pure Land, also understand that the nature of rebirth is intrinsically empty. This is true Non-Birth, and also the meaning of "only when the Mind is pure, will the Buddha lands be pure."

The dull and ignorant, on the other hand, are caught up in the concept of birth. Upon hearing the term "Birth," they understand it as actual birth; hearing of "Non-Birth," they [cling to its literal meaning] and think that there is no rebirth anywhere.[39] Little do they realize that "Birth is precisely Non-Birth, and Non-Birth does not hinder Birth."[40]

Because they do not understand this principle, they provoke arguments, slandering and deprecating those who seek rebirth in the Western Pure Land. What a great mistake! They are guilty of vilifying the Dharma and belong to the ranks of deluded externalists (non-Buddhists).

Question 3

All the pure lands of the Buddhas of the ten directions have equal qualities and virtues. Their Dharma Nature is also the same. Therefore, the practitioner should meditate on all the virtues of the Buddhas and seek rebirth in the various pure lands of

the ten directions. Why should he specifically seek rebirth in the Pure Land of one particular Buddha (i.e., Amitabha)? Is this not contrary to the truth of "equality in seeking rebirth"?

Answer

All the pure lands of the Buddhas are, in truth, equal. Nevertheless, since the majority of sentient beings in our world generally have dull faculties and defiled, scattered minds, it will be difficult for them to achieve samadhi, unless they concentrate exclusively on one realm.

The practice of constantly focussing on Amitabha Buddha is the "Single Mark Samadhi." Because the Mind is exclusively devoted to one thing, the practitioner achieves rebirth in the Pure Land. In the Sutra *Rebirth According to One's Vows,* Buddha Sakyamuni was asked by a Bodhisattva, "Honored One! There are pure lands in all ten directions. Why do you especially extol the Western Pure Land and urge sentient beings to focus continuously on Amitabha Buddha, seeking rebirth in His Land?"

The Buddha replied, "Sentient beings in this Saha World generally have polluted, scattered minds. Therefore, I only extol one pure land in the West, focussing their Minds on a single realm. If they meditate on all Buddhas, the scope of attention will be too broad, their Minds will be lost and scattered and they will find samadhi difficult to attain. Thus, they will fail to achieve rebirth in the Pure Land.

"Furthermore, seeking the virtues of *one* Buddha is the same as seeking the virtues of *all* Buddhas -- as all Buddhas have one common Dharma Nature. That is why to focus on Amitabha Buddha is to focus on all

Buddhas, to be born in the Western Pure Land is to be born in all pure lands."

Thus, the *Avatamsaka Sutra* states:

"The bodies of all the Buddhas / *are* the body of any one Buddha. / They have the same Mind and the same wisdom. / They are also equal in *power* and *fearlessness*."

The *Avatamsaka Sutra* further states:

"It is like the full moon, round and bright, its image reflected in all rivers and ponds. Although the reflection is everywhere, there is but a single moon. So it is with ... [the Buddhas]. Although they appear in all realms, their bodies are non-dual."

In summary, based on these examples, the wise will understand the truth that "one is all, all is one."[41] When this truth is grasped, concentrating on one Buddha is precisely concentrating on all Buddhas.

Question 4

There are many Buddhas and pure lands in all the ten directions. Even if sentient beings in this world have polluted, scattered minds and dispositions, so that focussing on many Buddhas makes it difficult for them to attain samadhi, why should they not recite the name of *any* Buddha, as they wish, and seek rebirth in *any* pure land, in accordance with their vows? Why concentrate specifically on Amitabha Buddha and seek rebirth in the Land of Ultimate Bliss?

Answer

Common people lacking in wisdom should follow

the teaching of the Buddha rather than acting arbitrarily on their own. This is why, from time immemorial, Pure Land practitioners have all diligently recited Amitabha Buddha's name.

What does it mean to follow the Buddha's teaching?

During his entire preaching career, Buddha Sakyamuni constantly enjoined sentient beings to focus on Amitabha Buddha and seek rebirth in the Land of Ultimate Bliss. This is mentioned in such sutras as the *Longer Amitabha Sutra*, the *Meditation Sutra*, the *Amitabha Sutra*, the *Lotus Sutra*, the *Avatamsaka Sutra*... In numerous sutras, the Buddha constantly urged us to seek rebirth in the Western Land. This is not only true of the sutras; in their commentaries, the Bodhisattvas and Patriarchs unanimously advise us to seek rebirth in the Land of Ultimate Bliss.

Moreover, Amitabha Buddha possesses the power of His forty-eight compassionate vows to rescue sentient beings.[42] The *Meditation Sutra* states:

"Amitabha Buddha possesses 84,000 signs of perfection, each sign has 84,000 minor marks of excellence and from each minor mark 84,000 rays of light shine forth, illuminating the entire Dharma Realm [cosmos] to gather in, without exception, all sentient beings who practice Buddha Recitation. If any sentient being recites His name, there will be correspondence between cause and response, and he will surely be reborn."

Furthermore, the *Amitabha Sutra*, the *Longer Amitabha Sutra*, etc., teach that when Sakyamuni Buddha preached these sutras, the Buddhas of the ten directions, numerous as the grains of sand in the River Ganges, all "extended their tongues to cover the entire universe," bearing witness to the truth that any sentient being who recites Amitabha Buddha's name shall be

assured of rebirth in the Land of Ultimate Bliss, thanks to the great, compassionate vow-power of the Buddha.

We should know that Amitabha Buddha has great affinities (causes and conditions) with this world. As the *Longer Amitabha Sutra* states:

"In the Dharma-Ending Age, when all other sutras have disappeared, only this sutra will remain for another hundred years to rescue sentient beings and lead them to the Western Pure Land."

This demonstrates that Amitabha Buddha has strong affinities with sentient beings in this defiled world.

Although one or two sutras have, in a general way, urged rebirth in other pure lands, this cannot be compared to the fact that numerous sutras and commentaries have earnestly pointed to the Land of Ultimate Bliss as the focus of rebirth.[43]

Question 5

Ordinary people are entirely enmeshed in heavy evil karma and are full of all kinds of afflictions. Even though they may have some virtues as a result of cultivation, they find it difficult to sever even a fraction of their defilements and hindrances. The Land of Ultimate Bliss, on the other hand, is extremely purely adorned, transcending the Triple Realm. How can such depraved common mortals hope to be reborn there?

Answer

There are two conditions for rebirth: "self-power" and "other-power." As far as self-power is concerned, while the ordinary beings of this world, totally bound [by

their attachments and afflictions], may have some level of cultivation, in reality, they still cannot be reborn in the Pure Land nor deserve to reside there.

The *Peace and Bliss Collection* states:

"Those who first develop the Bodhi Mind -- starting from the level of completely fettered ordinary beings ignorant of the Three Treasures and the Law of Cause and Effect -- should base themselves initially on *faith.* Next, when they have embarked upon the Bodhi path, the *precepts* should serve as their foundation. If these ordinary beings accept the Bodhisattva precepts and continue to uphold them unfailingly and without interruption for three kalpas, they will reach the First Abode of Bodhisattvahood.

"If they pursue their cultivation in this manner through ... the Ten Paramitas as well as countless vows and practices, one after another without interruption, at the end of ten thousand kalpas they will reach the Sixth Abode of Bodhisattvahood. Should they continue still further, they will reach the Seventh Abode (Non-Retrogression). They will then have entered the stage of the 'Seed of Buddhahood,' [i.e., they are assured of eventual Buddhahood]. However, even then, they still cannot achieve rebirth in the Pure Land" -- that is, if they rely on self-power alone.

With regard to "other-power," if anyone believes in the power of Amitabha Buddha's compassionate vow to rescue sentient beings and then develops the Bodhi Mind, cultivates the Buddha Remembrance [Recitation] Samadhi, grows weary of his temporal, impure body in the Triple Realm, practices charity, upholds the precepts and performs other meritorious deeds - - dedicating all the merits and virtues to rebirth in the Western Land -- his aspirations and the Buddha's response will be in accord. Relying thus on the Buddha's power, he will immediately achieve rebirth.[44]

Thus, it is stated in the *Commentary on the Ten Stages of Bodhisattvahood:*

"There are two paths of cultivation, the Difficult Path and the Easy Path. The Difficult Path refers to the practices of sentient beings in the world of the five turbidities, who, through countless Buddha eras, aspire to reach the stage of Non-Retrogression. The difficulties are truly countless, as numerous as specks of dust or grains of sand, too numerous to imagine. I will summarize the five major ones below:

a) Externalists are legion, creating confusion with respect to the Bodhisattva Dharma;

b) Evil beings destroy the practitioner's good, wholesome virtues;

c) Worldly merits and blessings can easily lead the practitioner astray, so that he ceases to engage in virtuous practices;

d) It is easy to stray onto the Arhat's path of self-benefit, which obstructs the Mind of great compassion;

e) Relying exclusively on self-power, without the aid of the Buddha's power, makes cultivation very difficult and arduous. It is not unlike the case of a feeble, handicapped person, walking alone, who can only go so far each day regardless of how much effort he expends.

"The Easy Path of cultivation means that, if sentient beings in this world believe in the Buddha's words, practice Buddha Recitation and vow to be reborn in the Pure Land, they are assisted by the Buddha's vow-power and assured of rebirth. This is analagous to a person who floats downstream

in a boat; although the distance may be many thousands of miles, his destination will be reached in no time. Similarly, a common being, relying on the power of a 'universal monarch'[a kind of deity], can traverse the 'four great universes' in a day and a night -- this is not due to his own power, but, rather, to the power of the monarch."

Some people, reasoning according to "noumenon," (principle) may say that common beings, being "conditioned," [see Glossary] cannot be reborn in the Pure Land or see the Buddha's body.

The answer is that the virtues of Buddha Recitation are "unconditioned" good roots. Ordinary, impure persons who develop the Bodhi Mind, seek rebirth and constantly practice Buddha Recitation can subdue and destroy afflictions, achieve rebirth and, depending on their level of cultivation, obtain vision of the rudimentary aspects of the Buddha [the thirty-two marks of greatness, for example]. Bodhisattvas, naturally, can achieve rebirth and see the subtle, loftier aspects of the Buddha [i.e., the Dharma body]. There can be no doubt about this.

Thus, the *Avatamsaka Sutra* states:

"All the various Buddha lands are equally purely adorned. Because the karmic practices of sentient beings differ, their perceptions of these lands are different."

This is the meaning of what was said earlier.

Question 6

Although sentient beings, completely enmeshed in afflictions and evil views, may achieve rebirth in the Pure Land, they are bound to develop afflictions and perverse views constantly. Under these circumstances, how can they be said to have "transcended the Triple Realm and attained the stage of Non-Retrogression"?

Answer

Those who are reborn in the Pure Land, though they may be ordinary beings totally enmeshed in evil karma, cannot ever develop afflictions or perverse views, nor can they fail to achieve non-retrogression. This is due to five factors:

a) The power of the Buddha's great, compassionate vow embraces and protects them;

b) The Buddha's light [wisdom] always shines upon them and, therefore, the Bodhi Mind of these superior persons will always progress;

c) In the Western Pure Land, the birds, water, forests, trees, wind and music all preach the Dharma of "suffering, emptiness, impermanence and no-self." Upon hearing this, practitioners begin to focus on the Buddha, the Dharma and the Sangha;

d) Those who are reborn in the Pure Land have the highest level Bodhisattvas as their companions and are free from all obstacles, calamities and evil conditions. Moreover there are no externalists or evil demons, so their Minds are always calm and still;

e) Once they are reborn in the Pure Land, their life span is inexhaustible, equal to that of the Buddhas and

Bodhisattvas. Thus, they can peacefully cultivate for countless eons.

As a result of these five causes and conditions, sentient beings who are reborn in the Pure Land will certainly achieve non-retrogression and will never develop afflictions or perverse views. Sentient beings in this world of the five turbidities, on the other hand, have short life spans and face a host of perverse conditions and obstructions. Therefore, they have great difficulty achieving non-retrogression. This truth is self-evident and beyond doubt.

Question 7

The Bodhisattva Maitreya is a One-Life Bodhisattva who is now in the Tusita Heaven. He will succeed Buddha Sakyamuni and become a Buddha in the future. I venture to think that we should cultivate the loftier aspects of the Ten Virtues and seek to be reborn in the Tusita Heaven, to see Him in person.[45] When the time comes for Him to descend to earth and become a Buddha, we will follow Him and certainly achieve Sagehood in the course of His three teaching assemblies. Therefore, where is the need to seek rebirth in the Western Pure Land?

Answer

Seeking rebirth in the Tusita Heaven could be considered equivalent to hearing the Dharma and seeing the Buddha. It seems very similar to seeking rebirth in the Western Pure Land. However, upon close scrutiny, there are many great differences between the two. Let us cite two points for the sake of discussion.

A) Even though we may cultivate the Ten Virtues, it is not certain that we will achieve rebirth in the Tusita Heaven. As stated in the sutras:

"The practitioner must cultivate the various samadhi and enter deeply into right concentration to obtain rebirth in the Inner Court of the Tusita Heaven."

From that we can deduce that the Bodhisattva Maitreya lacks the expedient of "welcoming and escorting." This cannot be compared to the power of Amitabha Buddha's Original Vow and His power of light, which can gather in and rescue all sentient beings who concentrate on Him.

Moreover, when Buddha Sakyamuni explained the meaning of the "welcoming and escorting" expedient in his exposition of the nine grades of rebirth, he earnestly enjoined sentient beings to seek rebirth in the Western Pure Land. This expedient is very simple. The practitioner need only recite the name of Amitabha Buddha and, thanks to the congruence of sentiment and response, he will immediately achieve rebirth. This is analogous to an enlistment campaign: those who wish to join the army may do so immediately, as their desire parallels the goal of the state.

B) Secondly, the Tusita Heaven is, after all, still within the Realm of Desire [to which our Saha World also belongs]. Therefore, those who retrogress are legion. In that Heaven, the birds, rivers, forests, trees, wind ... do not preach the Dharma and thus cannot help sentient beings destroy afflictions, focus on the Triple Jewel nor develop the Bodhi Mind. Moreover, in that realm, there are goddesses who kindle the five desires in the Minds of celestial beings, to the point where few of them escape distraction and infatuation.

How can this be compared to the Western Pure Land,[46] where the trees and birds proclaim the wonderful Dharma and the wind sings of enlightenment, destroying the afflictions of sentient beings and reinforcing the Bodhi Mind of practitioners?[47] Moreover, in the Pure Land of Amitabha Buddha, there are no seductive beings[48] or beings concerned with self-enlightenment alone. There are only pure vessels of the Mahayana way. Therefore, afflictions and evil karma cannot arise. Under these circumstances, how can cultivators fail to achieve the stage of non-retrogression swiftly?[49] We have only drawn a few points of comparison, yet the differences between the Pure Land and the Tusita Heaven are already obvious. How can there be any further doubt or hesitation?

Moreover, seeing the Bodhisattva Maitreya and achieving the fruits of Arhatship is not necessarily a sure thing! During the lifetime of Buddha Sakyamuni, there were many who saw the Buddha but did not achieve sagehood. In the future, when the Bodhisattva Maitreya appears in the world, the same will be true: countless sentient beings will see Him and listen to the Dharma but not attain Arhatship. Such is not the case in the Pure Land of Amitabha Buddha: to be reborn there is to be assured of attaining the Tolerance of Non-Birth, with no possible retrogression to the Triple World nor bondage to the karma of Birth and Death.

In the *Accounts of the Western Land [i.e., India]*, there is the story of three Bodhisattvas, Asanga, Vasubandhu and Simhabhadra, all of whom practiced meditation, determined to seek rebirth in the Tusita Heaven. They all vowed that if the first one of them to die were reborn in the Inner Court of the Tusita Heaven and saw the Bodhisattva Maitreya, he would return and inform the others. Simhabhadra died first, but a long

time elapsed and he still had not returned. Later, when Vasabandhu was nearing death, Asanga said to him, "After paying your respects to Maitreya, come back and let me know right away." Vasabandhu died, but did not return for three years. Asanga inquired, "Why did it take you so long?" Vasabandhu answered, "After paying my respects to the Bodhisattva Maitreya, listening to His sermon and exhortations, and respectfully circumambulating Him three times, I came back immediately. I could not return sooner because a day and night in the Tusita heaven is equivalent to four hundred years on earth."

Asanga then asked, "Where is Simhabhadra now?" Vasubhandu replied, "He has strayed into the Outer Court of the Tusita Heaven, and is now entangled in the five pleasures. From the time of his death to now, he has been unable to see Maitreya."

We can deduce from this anecdote that even lesser Bodhisattvas who are reborn in the Tusita Heaven are subject to delusion, not to mention common mortals. Therefore, practitioners who wish to be assured of non-retrogression should seek rebirth in the Western Pure Land rather than the Tusita Heaven.

Question 8

From time immemorial, sentient beings have committed countless transgressions. Moreover, in this life, from infancy to old age, they create additional evil karma because they do not have the opportunity to encounter good spiritual advisors. Under these circumstances, how can it be said that "At the time of death, they will achieve rebirth with only ten perfect utterances of the Buddha's name"? Furthermore, how do you satisfactorily explain the teaching that such

practitioners "transcend the binding karma of the Triple Realm"?

Answer

In truth, it is difficult to assess the number or the strength of the good and evil karmic seeds that sentient beings have created from time immemorial. However, those who, at the time of death, encounter a good spiritual advisor and accomplish ten utterances, must have created good karma in the past. Otherwise, they could not even meet a good spiritual advisor, let alone accomplish ten pure recitations!

Now, lest you think that the evil karma from beginningless time is heavy while ten utterances at the time of death are light, I shall cite three reasons why rebirth in the Pure Land does not necessarily depend on the weight of bad karma, the amount of practice or the duration of cultivation. The three reasons concern a) the Mind, b) the conditions and c) the issue of certainty.

a) Mind

The transgressions committed by sentient beings spring from deluded, perverse thought. Recitation of the Buddha's name, on the other hand, arises from right thought, that is, hearing of Amitabha Buddha's name and true virtues. One is false and the other is true. There is no possible comparison between them!

This is similar to a house which has been boarded up for ten thousand years. If the windows are suddenly opened to let the sunlight in, all darkness immediately dissipates. However long the period of darkness may have been, how can it fail to disappear? It is likewise for sentient beings who have committed transgressions for many eons but achieve rebirth at the time of death

through ten pure recitations.

b) Conditions

Transgressions grow out of dark, inverted thoughts, combined with illusory circumstances and environments. Buddha Recitation, on the contrary, arises from hearing of Amitabha Buddha's name and pure virtues, combined with the aspiration for enlightenment. One is false and the other is true. There is no possible comparison between them!

This is analagous to a person struck by a poisoned arrow. The arrow has penetrated deep inside his body and the poison is strong, deeply wounding his flesh and bones. Still, if at that moment he hears the "celestial drum,"[50] the arrow will "shoot out" of his flesh by itself and the poison will be neutralized. The arrow has not penetrated so deep nor is the poison so strong that he cannot recover! It is likewise for sentient beings who have committed transgressions for many eons but achieve rebirth at the time of death through ten pure recitations.

c) Certainty of Salvation

When sentient beings commit transgressions, they do so either from the "intervening mental state" or the "post-mental state." These two mental states do not apply, however, at the time of death: there is only one extremely powerful, utterly intense thought of recitation, letting go of everything before dying. Therefore, rebirth is achieved.

This is analogous to a very large, strong cable which even thousands of people cannot break. Yet, a child wielding a "celestial sword" can cut it in several pieces without difficulty. It is also similar to a huge pile of

wood, accumulated for thousands of years, which, when set on fire by a small flame, is completely consumed within a short time. The same is true of someone who has practiced the Ten Virtues throughout his life, seeking rebirth in the Heavens. If, at the time of death, he develops an intense perverse thought, he will immediately descend, instead, into the Avici (Never-Ending) Hell.

Although bad karma is intrinsically false and illusory, the overpowering strength of Mind and thought can still upset a lifetime of good karma and cause the individual to descend onto evil paths. How, then, can Buddha Recitation, which is true, wholesome karma, generated intensely at the time of death, fail to upset his bad karma, even though that karma may have been accumulated from time immemorial? Therefore, someone who has committed transgressions for many eons, but, at the time of death accomplishes ten recitations with a totally earnest Mind, will certainly be reborn in the Pure Land. Not to achieve rebirth under such circumstances would indeed be inconceivable!

The sutras teach:

"A single utterly sincere recitation of Amitabha Buddha's name obliterates the grave wrongdoings of eight million eons of Birth and Death."

This is possible because the practitioner recites the Buddha's name with a Mind of utmost sincerity and therefore can annihilate evil karma. As long as, on his deathbed, he utters the Buddha's name in such a frame of Mind, he will be assured of rebirth. There can be no further doubt about it!

Traditionally, it has been explained that the dying person's ability to recite ten utterances is due entirely to previous good karma. This explanation is not, however,

correct. Why is this so? It is because, as a commentary states, "if it were merely a question of previous karma, only the vow for rebirth would be necessary, and there would be no place at all for practice ..."

The practitioner who, on his deathbed, accomplishes ten recitations, is able to do so because of his previous good conditions (enabling him to meet a good spiritual advisor) *and* because of his own wholehearted recitation. To attribute rebirth in such circumstances exclusively to previous good karma would be a great mistake! I hope that practitioners will ponder this truth deeply, develop a firm Mind, and not be led astray by erroneous views.

Question 9

The Western Pure Land is ten billion Buddha lands away from here. Common, ordinary people are weak and frail. How can they reach it? ...

Answer

The Western Pure Land is described as being ten billion Buddha lands away from here only with respect to the limited concepts of ordinary people with eyes of flesh and blood, mired in birth and death.

For those who have attained the pure karma of rebirth in the Pure Land, the Mind in samadhi at the time of death is precisely the Mind reborn in the Pure Land. As soon as the thought [of rebirth] arises, rebirth is achieved. Thus, the *Meditation Sutra* states that "the Land of Amitabha Buddha is not far from here!" Moreover, the power of karma is inconceivable. In the space of one thought, rebirth in the Pure Land is

achieved. There is no need to worry about distance.

This is analogous to a person asleep and dreaming. Although his body is on the bed, his Mind is travelling all over, to all worlds, as though he were awake. Rebirth in the Pure Land is, generally speaking, similar to this example ...[51]

Question 10

I have now resolved to seek rebirth in the Western Pure Land. However, I do not know which practices to cultivate, nor what the seeds of rebirth in the Western Pure Land are. Moreover, ordinary people all have families and have not rid themselves of lust and attachment. This being the case, can they achieve rebirth?

Answer

If a cultivator wishes to be assured of rebirth, he should perfect two practices: the practice of "disgust" [at the five desires] and the practice of "joyfulness in vows."[52]

A) The practice of "disgust" refers to the fact that common people have been bound by the five desires from time immemorial. Thus, they wander along the six paths, enduring untold suffering! In that quagmire, unless they become disgusted with the five desires, how can they escape the cycle of birth and death?

Therefore, the Pure Land cultivator should constantly visualize this body as a mass of flesh and bones, blood and pus, a skinbag containing phlegm, pus, urine, feces and other foul-smelling substances. The

Parinirvana Sutra states:

"This fortress of a body -- only evil, deluded demons could tolerate living in it. Who with any wisdom would ever cling to to or delight in such a skinbag!"

Another scripture states:

"This body is the confluence of all kinds of suffering; it is a jail, a prison, a mass of ulcers; everything is impure. In truth, it is not worth clinging to -- even the celestial bodies of deities are no different."

Therefore, whether walking, standing, sitting or reclining, whether asleep or awake, cultivators should always visualize this body as nothing but a source of suffering, without any pleasure, and develop a deep sense of disgust ... [thus gradually becoming free from lustful thoughts].

Moreover, the cultivator should also engage in the Seven Types of Meditation on Impurity (e.g., as a fetus, in the impure, dirty area of the womb, drinking the mother's blood, emerging from the womb with pus and blood gushing forth and foul odors in profusion ... after death, the body swelling up and rotting away, with flesh and bones in disarray ...).[53]

Our own bodies being thus, the bodies of others are likewise. If we constantly meditate on these seven impurities, we will develop disgust toward those male and female forms which ordinary people judge handsome and beautiful. The flames of lust will thus gradually diminish.

If, in addition, we can practice the meditations on the Nine Kinds Of Foulness, (e.g., meditation on the fresh corpse, the bloated corpse, the bleeding and oozing corpse, the skeleton ... and other progressive

stages of decay of the human body after death), so much the better.

We should also vow to be forever free from rebirth in a deluded, impure male or female body in the Triple Realm, eating a hodgepodge of foods, and aspire instead to be endowed with a Pure Land Dharma Nature body.

This constitutes a general discussion of the practice of disgust.

B) There are, in general, two aspects to making the *joyous vow* of "rescuing oneself and others."

1) The practitioner should clearly realize the goal of rebirth -- which is to seek escape from suffering for himself and all sentient beings. He should think thus: "My own strength is limited, I am still bound by karma; moreover, in this evil, defiled life, the circumstances and conditions leading to afflictions are overpowering. That is why other sentient beings and myself are drowning in the river of delusion, wandering along the evil paths from time immemorial. The wheel of birth and death is spinning without end; how can I find a way to rescue myself and others in a safe, sure manner?

"There is but one solution: it is to seek rebirth in the Pure Land, draw close to the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas, and, relying on the supremely auspicious environment of that realm, engage in cultivation and attain the Tolerance of Non-Birth. Only then can I enter the evil world to rescue sentient beings."

The *Treatise on Rebirth* states:

"To develop the Bodhi Mind is precisely to seek Buddhahood; to seek Buddhahood is to develop the Mind of rescuing sentient beings; and the Mind of rescuing sentient

beings is none other than the Mind that gathers in all beings and helps them achieve rebirth in the Pure Land."

Moreover, to ensure rebirth, we should perfect two practices: abandoning the three things that hinder enlightenment and abiding by the three things that foster enlightenment.

What are the three things that hinder enlightenment?

First, the Mind of seeking our own peace and happiness, ego-grasping and attachment to our own bodies. The practitioner should follow the path of wisdom and leave all such thoughts far behind.

Second, the Mind of abandoning and failing to rescue sentient beings from suffering. The practitioner should follow the path of compassion and leave all such thoughts far behind.

Third, the Mind of exclusively seeking respect and offerings, without seeking ways to benefit sentient beings and bring them peace and happiness. The practitioner should follow the path of expedients and leave all such thoughts far behind.

Once he has abandoned these three hindrances, the practitioner will obtain the three things that foster enlightenment. They are:

First, the "undefiled Pure Mind" of not seeking personal happiness. That is, enlightenment is the state of undefiled purity. If we seek after personal pleasure, body and Mind are defiled and obstruct the path of enlightenment. Therefore, the undefiled Pure Mind is called consonant with enlightenment.

Second, the "Pure Mind at peace," rescuing all sentient beings from suffering. This is because Bodhi is the undefiled Pure Mind which gives peace and happiness to sentient beings. If we are not rescuing sentient beings and helping them to escape the sufferings of Birth and Death, we are going counter to the Bodhi path. Therefore, a Mind focussed on saving others, bringing them peace and happiness, is called consonant with enlightenment.

Third, a "blissful, Pure Mind," seeking to help sentient beings achieve Great Nirvana. Because Great Nirvana is the ultimate, eternally blissful realm, if we do not help sentient beings to achieve it, we obstruct the Bodhi path. Hence, the Mind which seeks to help sentient beings attain eternal bliss is called consonant with enlightenment.

How can we abandon the things that hinder enlightenment and abide by the things that foster enlightenment? -- It is precisely by seeking rebirth in the Western Pure Land, remaining constantly near the Buddhas and cultivating the Dharma until Tolerance of Non-Birth is reached. At that point, we may sail the boat of great vows at will, enter the sea of Birth and Death and rescue sentient beings with wisdom and compassion, "adapting to conditions but fundamentally unchanging,"[54] free and unimpeded. This ends our discussion of the goal of rebirth.

2) The cultivator should next contemplate the wholesome characteristics of the Pure Land and the auspicious features of Amitabha Buddha.

Auspicious features:

Amitabha Buddha possesses a resplendent, golden Reward Body, replete with 84,000 major characteristics, each characteristic having 84,000 minor auspicious signs, each sign beaming 84,000 rays of light which illuminate the entire Dharma Realm and gather in those sentient beings who recite the Buddha's name [Ninth Visualization in the *Meditation Sutra*].

Wholesome characteristics:

The Western Pure Land is adorned with seven treasures, as explained in the Pure Land sutras.[55]

In addition, when practicing charity, keeping the precepts and performing all kinds of good deeds, Pure Land practitioners should always dedicate the merits toward rebirth in the Pure Land for themselves and all other sentient beings.

If the practitioner can cultivate joyfulness in vows, as set out in section B, he will develop a Mind of hope and longing for the Pure Land and achieve rebirth without fail. This is what is meant by vowing to rescue oneself and others.

Doubts and Questions about Pure Land

(Ching-t'u Huo-wen)

T.47, No. 1972

淨土或問

天如則禪師

Elder Zen Master T'ien Ju

The [Bodhisattvas] also conceive this overwhelming determination: "If I attain complete, perfect enlightenment first without having established all sentient beings on the path of unsurpassed liberation, I would be violating my original vow -- that would never do ... Why? Sentient beings have not asked me to set my mind on enlightenment -- I of my own accord act as an unsolicited friend to sentient beings, wishing to first cause all beings to fully develop their good potential and attain omniscience."

"The Ten Practices"
Avatamsaka Sutra, Chap. 21
Thomas Cleary, tr.

Elder Master T'ien Ju was seated in meditation in the Hall of Reclining Clouds. Suddenly, someone pushed the door open, stepped inside and introduced himself as a Zen guest. The Master greeted him with a silent nod and extended his hand, inviting him to sit down. They remained thus, facing one another, for a long time ... The sunlight was disappearing through the bamboo window and the smoke from the incense burner had dwindled to a trickle when the guest monk leisurely arose, solemnly rearranged his robe, and slowly began to address the Master.

Question 1

I venture to think that Elder Zen Master Yung Ming received the Direct Transmission Dharma with National Master Shao of T'ien T'ai Mountain. He was also in the direct lineage of Elder Master Fa Yen.[56] As the Abbot of the Ching Tzu Temple in Hangchou, he enlightened many monks and nuns to the Way. His eloquence and flexible wisdom were like the swirling winds and the roaring thunder. Zen monks at home and abroad praised him as a master of the highest achievement.

Nevertheless, why is it that, while preaching Zen, he personally cultivated Pure Land as well, exhorted others to recite the Buddha's name and wrote treatises propagating the Pure Land method? Moreover, he authored the verse "Four Options," [Ssu Liao Chien Chieh] which states in essence:[57]

"With Zen but without Pure Land, nine out of ten seekers of the Way take the wrong road ... Without Zen but with Pure Land, of ten thousand who practice, ten thousand reach the Pure Land ..."

With these lines, the Master seems to advocate the Pure Land method, disparaging his own school of Zen. Were his words not an exaggeration? My mind is filled with doubts on this point, and I would like to seek your instruction.[58]

Answer

That is a very good point. However, Elder Master Yung Ming did not, in fact, extol Pure Land excessively while denigrating Zen. Rather, his answers are of great benefit for both the Zen and Sutra Studies methods. Unfortunately, in the "Four Options," the Great Master merely gave a general explanation, which did not bring out all the subtleties of his thoughts. Therefore, he could not dispel the doubts of Zen disciples.

I am a follower of Zen and am not well-versed in the Pure Land method. However, through the treatises and sutras of that School, I can give you the following general explanation.

Pure Land is a method which is easy to practice and through which it is easy to achieve enlightenment. However, it is also difficult to explain and to believe in. When Buddha Sakyamuni was preaching the *Amitabha Sutra*, He was aware that sentient beings in the Dharma-Ending Age would have difficulty believing Him. He therefore quoted the earnest words of the Buddhas of the six directions to dispel the doubts and develop the faith of later generations. Near the end of the Sutra, referring to the various Buddhas who praised Him, Sakyamuni Buddha said:

"Shariputra! You should be aware that, in this evil age of five corruptions [see Note 33], I did this difficult thing: I obtained the highest perfect knowledge. For the sake of the whole world I preach this Dharma, which is difficult to believe in. This is extremely difficult." (H. Seki, *Amida Kyo*, New York: American Buddhist Academy, 1973, p.74.)

These are sincere, thorough words of instruction, enjoining people to develop faith in the Pure Land.

Moreover, with great, overflowing compassion, Buddha Sakyamuni has come to the world's rescue in this Dharma-Ending Age. Each of his words is accepted and put into practice by humans and celestial beings alike. Nevertheless, some sentient beings have doubts about this specific Pure Land teaching. Why is this so? It is because the Pure Land teaching is all-embracing, yet its practice is extremely simple, and these two opposing characteristics seem difficult to reconcile. This is why the Pure Land method easily engenders doubts in the Minds of listeners.

The method is *all-embracing* because it gathers in people of all capacities. Not only do the highest level and One-Life Bodhisattvas seek rebirth in the Pure Land, even unsophisticated men and women, as well as those who have committed the five grave offenses or the ten evil acts, will all achieve rebirth. They need only put their faith in and direct their Minds toward the Pure Land with utmost determination.[59]

On the other hand, this method is *simple* because the practitioner is not subjected to too many difficulties and hardships, nor does he have to pass through many different states of Mind, when he could easily be misled.[60] He need only recite the Buddha's name to ensure escape from the Saha World (our world), be reborn in the Western Pure Land and achieve

non-retrogression until Buddhahood is finally attained.

Because of these two characteristics of the Pure Land method, all-embracing yet simple, even the wise develop doubts. Thus, if you fully understand this point, you will realize that Elder Master Yung Ming's words of praise truly have a profound meaning and are not an exaggeration.

Question 2

I now understand the all-embracing yet simple nature of the Pure Land method. However, enlightened Zen Masters have said that "to see one's nature is to achieve Buddhahood." Why should we settle for rebirth in the Western Pure Land?

Answer

You ask such a question because you still do not understand. In fact, enlightened masters are the very ones who are urgently seeking rebirth. The ancients have said: "In which realm would one seek rebirth, if not the Pure Land?" From your question, I can see that you have not yet awakened to the Way -- because, once you have, your aspiration for rebirth cannot be restrained, even by ten thousand buffaloes!

Question 3

The reason Buddha Sakyamuni appeared in the world was to rescue sentient beings. As Buddhist followers, we should worry only about not having awakenened. Once awakened to the Way, we should be unconcerned about Birth and Death, and follow the

Buddha's example, manifesting ourselves in the evil realms to rescue all sentient beings ... If those who have awakened or attained enlightenment still seek rebirth in the Pure Land, are they not guilty of rejecting suffering, seeking happiness for themselves and abandoning those who are still mired in Birth and Death? I may be deluded and vile, but all the same, I abhor such an attitude!

Answer

You are too impatient -- like someone who discovers an egg and wants it to hatch immediately! Do you really think that after a momentary awakening you have extinguished all deluded habits and suddenly reached the stage of non-retrogression? Do you also think that, after such an awakening, you no longer have to study the Buddha Dharma in its totality nor engage in further cultivation so as to attain the various stages of Bodhisattvahood, step by step? Or are you by any chance thinking that, after a glimpse of enlightenment, you have become the equal of the Buddhas, free to enter and exit Birth and Death, unhindered and unperturbed by obstructing conditions?

If this were the case, the great Bodhisattvas who spent untold eons cultivating the paramitas and the ten thousand conducts should all feel ashamed, compared to you! The ancients have admonished:

"Arhats are still deluded at birth, Bodhisattvas are still deluded in the bardo stage!" [See Glossary.]

If this is true of sages, such as Arhats and Bodhisattvas, what can we say about those who have only superficially awakened and, in the midst of this world, cannot even save themselves?

Moreover, even if your awakening is profound, your

wisdom and understanding brilliant and lofty, and even if your practice is consonant with your understanding and you are determined to rescue sentient beings, as long as you have not reached the stage of non-retrogression, your skills and capacities are necessarily incomplete. Under these circumstances, should you decide to remain in this evil world to convert and rescue recalcitrant sentient beings, the sages and saints would not vouch for your success! It would be no different from attempting to rescue people from the raging sea with a boat that is neither sturdy nor watertight -- unavoidably, everyone would drown!

Thus, it is stated in the *Treatise on Rebirth*:

"If you wish to move freely in the nether worlds, if you wish to rescue deluded, suffering sentient beings, you should first seek rebirth in the Western Pure Land. Only after you have achieved Tolerance of Non-Birth should you return to the sea of Birth and Death to fulfill your original vow. It is because of these causes and conditions that the practitioner should seek rebirth in the Pure Land."

The sages of old have also said:

"Those who have not reached the stage of non-retrogression nor achieved Tolerance of Non-Birth should never be separated from the Buddhas. They are not unlike small children who should not leave their mothers or young birds who can only hop from branch to branch."

In this day and age, in this Saha World, Buddha Sakyamuni has entered Nirvana, while Maitreya, the future Buddha, is not yet born. Moreover, along the Four Evil Paths, sentient beings are easily swayed by interlinking cause and effect, exposed to hundreds of heterodox, evil teachings, perturbed by criticism and calumny, lured by beautiful forms and sensuous sounds, continuously under the influence of evanescent

circumstances and evil conditions. Under such conditions, with no Buddha to rely on and disturbed by the evil environment, how many of the newly awakened can avoid retrogression?

That is why Buddha Sakyamuni has earnestly recommended rebirth in the Western Pure Land. In that Land, Buddha Amitabha now preaches the Dharma, and in that Land favorable conditions abound. Once reborn, relying on the help of the Ocean-wide Assembly, the practitioner swiftly achieves the Tolerance of Non-Birth. Moreover, as he is always in the company of the King of the Dharma, he easily attains Buddhahood. At that time, there are no obstructions to prevent him from appearing in the world at will, to rescue sentient beings. Therefore, even those of the highest capacity, endowed with wisdom, must seek rebirth, not to mention people like you who are of only moderate or low capacities, and are barely awakened!

Do you not know that in the *Sutra on the Buddha Visualization Samadhi*, the Bodhisattva Manjusri himself recalled his cultivation in past lifetimes and revealed that he had attained the Buddha Remembrance Samadhi and usually dwelled in the pure lands? For this reason Buddha Sakyamuni predicted, "You will be reborn in the Land of Ultimate Bliss!"

Do you not also know that in the *Avatamsaka Sutra*, the Bodhisattva Samantabhadra urged Sudhana and the Ocean-wide Assembly to dedicate the virtues of the Ten Great Vows toward rebirth in the Western Pure Land? The Sutra contains the following passage:

> "I vow that when my life approaches its end,
> All obstructions will be swept away;
> I will see Amita Buddha,/And be born in his Land of
> Ultimate Bliss and peace."
> (Hsuan Hua, tr. *Flower Adornment Sutra,* Ch. 40. p. 214.)

Do you not also know that, in the *Lankavatara Sutra*, Buddha Sakyamuni predicted:

"In the future, in southern India, there will be an Elder Master of high repute and virtue named Nagarjuna ... He will attain the first Bodhisattva stage of Extreme Joy and be reborn in the Western Pure Land."

Do you not also realize that in the *Treatise on the Awakening of the Faith*, the Patriarch Asvaghosha[61] also extolled rebirth? In the *Maharatnakuta Sutra*, Buddha Sakyamuni predicted that his father, King Suddhodana, along with seventy thousand relatives, would be reborn in the Pure Land. In the *Meditation Sutra*, Buddha Sakyamuni taught Queen Vaidehi and her five hundred attendants how to pay homage to Amitabha Buddha ...[62]

[Let us be impartial and ask ourselves this question: if even great Bodhisattvas such as Manjusri and Samantabhadra, and towering Patriarchs such as Asvaghosha and Nagarjuna[64] sought rebirth, vowing to see Amitabha Buddha, who are today's barely awakened practitioners to reject rebirth? Indeed, to do so is tantamount to considering their own achievements to be higher than those of the Bodhisattvas and Patriarchs! That is inconceivable!

[In later times, in China, for example, Elder Master Hui Yuan of Lu Shan (334-416) founded the Lotus Society, which was devoted exclusively to Pure Land practice, while many other masters and laymen belonging to both the T'ien T'ai and Avatamsaka traditions personally cultivated Buddha Recitation and widely expounded the Pure Land method.[63] Following one another's example, they sought rebirth in the Pure Land.

[Furthermore, over the centuries, in China, numerous Zen Masters, in addition to meditation, quietly practiced and propagated Pure Land teachings.[65] Among them are found many Elder Masters of high achievement, including Masters Yung Ming, T'ien I Huai, Yuan Chao Pen, Tzu Shou Shen ...][66]

Not only did these Zen Masters follow the Pure Land method, I [Master T'ien Ju] have heard a Zen monk of high achievement say, "almost all monks, both within and outside the Five Houses of Zen,[67] awakened to the Way or not, set their Minds on the Pure Land." When I asked the reason, the Master replied:

"Elder Zen Master Pai Chang[68] of Huai Hai [one of the most famous Zen Masters of all time] was the direct successor to the great Zen Master Ma Tsu of Chiang Hsi.[69] Zen communities throughout the world are established on his model and have adopted the *Pure Rules* for monasteries which he instituted. Since ancient times, no one has dared to criticize or violate this set of rules.

"According to these Rules, prayers for the benefit of seriously ill monks and nuns include the following passage: 'The fourfold assembly should gather together, and all should recite verses of praise to Amitabha Buddha and chant his name from one hundred to one thousand times. At the end, the following words of transference should be read: "*If conditions have not yet come to an end, let him quickly recover. If the time of death has arrived, we pray that he will be reborn in the Pure Land.*"' Is this not pointing the way back to the Pure Land?

"Moreover, the liturgy for sending off deceased monks includes this passage: 'the great assembly should all recite the name of Amitabha Buddha in unison, transferring the merits and making the following vow: "*Let his soul be reborn in the Pure Land, his karma in the world of dust severed; let him be reborn in the upper lotus grade, with a golden body. May he also receive a prediction of Buddhahood in one lifetime.*"' Is this not pointing the way back to the Pure Land?

"Furthermore, at the time of burial or cremation, the *Pure Rules* stipulate: 'The monk in charge of the service should lead the way, striking the small bell, and recite the name of Amitabha Buddha ten times, with the great assembly following in unison. After recitation, the following words of transference should be read: '*We have just intoned the Buddha's name ten times to assist in rebirth ...*'" Is this not pointing the way back to the Pure Land?

"It is for these reasons that this old monk said, 'Zen Masters the world over all set their Minds on the Pure Land.'"

I listened to the Zen Master's explanations and, as they were fully substantiated, cannot find any reason to refute them. The profound and lofty meaning behind Master Pai Chang's *Pure Rules* then dawned on me ...

Residing as you are in a monastery complex, you must have "sent off" countless monks. Your ears must have heard and your mouth uttered "ten recitations" an untold number of times. Your Mind must have focussed on the transference of merit to the Pure Land innumerable times! In spite of all this, you have not yet awakened nor have you understood the real intentions of the Patriarchs, and are deluded to the point of claiming that "those who have awakened or reached enlightenment do not seek rebirth." Truly, your disease of grasping, of clinging to Zen, has no equal in the whole, wide world![70]

Question 4

The "gathering power" [i.e., teaching] of the Pure Land method is truly all-embracing -- this foolish monk will no longer dare to comment upon it. However, I used to hear such expressions as "Self-Nature Amitabha, Mind-Only Pure Land," and could not but secretly

rejoice![71] That was so until I glanced through the Pure Land sutras and commentaries and discovered that the Pure Land is the Land of Ultimate Bliss, ten billion Buddha lands from here, and that Amitabha Buddha is the teacher of that Land. Thus, there seems to be a contradiction: *here* [i.e., Mind-Only Pure Land] and *there* [i.e., Pure Land in the West] are quite distant, and outside the truth of Mind-Only Self-Nature! How shall I understand this question?

Answer

You still have a superficial and narrow understanding of the issue. Do you not know that your True Mind is all-extensive and all-illuminating? The *Surangama Sutra* states:

"The various mountains, rivers and continents, even the empty space outside our physical body, are all realms and phenomena within the wonderful, bright True Mind."

It further states:

"Phenomena which are born -- they are all manifestations of Mind-Only."

Therefore, where can you find a Buddha land outside the Mind? Thus, the concept of Mind-Only Pure Land refers to the Pure Land within our True Mind. This is no different from the ocean, from which springs an untold number of bubbles, none of which is outside the wide ocean. It is also like the specks of dust in the soil, none of which is not soil. Likewise, there is no Buddha land which is not Mind. Therefore, sages and saints have said:

"This single Mind encompasses the four kinds of Lands in their totality: a) the Land of Common Residence of beings and saints; b) the Land of Expediency; c) the Land of True

Reward and d) the Land of Eternally Tranquil Light (Eternal Serenity and Illumination) ..." [The Land of Common Residence is further divided into the Common Residence *Pure* Land and the Common Residence *Impure* Land.][72]

The distinctions among the four lands are based on different levels of cultivation and achievement; however, they are in fact but one realm. The True Mind encompasses the ten thousand phenomena.[73] Lands as numerous as the specks of dust throughout the ten directions are none other than the realms in our own Mind; the countless Buddhas of the Three Periods of Time are also the Buddhas in our own Mind. Nothing exists outside our Self-Mind. Understanding this truth, we realize that there is no land which is established independently of our own Mind, there is no Buddha who appears without relying on our nature. This being the case, how can the Western Pure Land ten billion Buddha lands away from here not be the Pure Land of Mind-Only?

The Land of Ultimate Bliss being thus, the Teacher of that Land is, likewise, Buddha Amitabha of the Self-Nature. We should know that this Mind encompasses the totality of the Ten Realms, bodies and lands freely interpenetrating ad infinitum. We should know, further, that Mind, Buddha and sentient beings, while three, are in fact one:[74] they have the same Nature and are no different from one another. Sentient beings and Buddhas appear interchangeably, their thoughts meshing with one another's ...

The realm of the True Mind, encompassing untold lands, can be likened to the Jewel Net of Indra described in the *Avatamsaka Sutra*.

[This is a net said to hang in the palace of Indra, the king of the gods. At each interstice of the net is a

reflecting jewel, which mirrors not only the adjacent jewels but the multiple images reflected in them. This famous image is meant to describe the unimpeded interpenetration of all and everything.][75]

The Western Pure Land, as well as each of the ten billion Buddha lands, resembles one of the jewels in Indra's net.

On a more subtle level, throughout each and every land, from the Buddhas, Bodhisattvas and Arhats down to animals, hungry ghosts and hells, each and every thing resembles one of the jewels. *Buddha Amitabha himself is one of the jewels.* Therefore, to see one Buddha is to see all the Buddhas of the ten directions as well as the nine realms of sentient beings throughout the ten directions. The multitude of Buddha lands, the ten directions of the past and present -- the whole constitutes an "ocean seal," "sudden and perfect." There are no other dharmas.[76]

Thus, the "dusts" [sensory objects] throughout the ten billion Buddha lands are born by transformation precisely within our own Self-Mind. How can the "substance" [i.e., beings] which appears in the nine Lotus Grades [see Glossary] be separate from or outside the True Thusness Buddha? These explanations are the enlightened teachings of the Buddhas, Patriarchs, sages and saints. If we understand this truth, we will see that the Western Pure Land is Mind-Only, each Buddha land, each mote of dust, is also Mind-Only, Lord Amitabha Buddha is the Self-Nature, and each Buddha, each sentient being is also the Self-Nature.[77] Thus, what is there to doubt?

Additional Comments by Dharma Master Thiền Tâm

The Dharma Realm True Mind is an immensely

broad and extensive state, encompassing an untold number of lands, Buddhas and sentient beings.

In that One True State, the aspect of lands and sentient beings, constantly in flux, pertains to the "Door of Birth and Death." The silent and illuminating aspect -- still, wonderful, clear, bright and everlasting -- is called the "Door of True Thusness."

The True Mind is a Common True State encompassing those two Doors, the conditioned and the unconditioned. All the following expressions refer to that True Nature: True Mind, Self-Nature, Buddha Nature, Womb of the Tathagata, Dharma Realm, Dharma Nature, True Mark, Nirvana, Dharma Body, Alaya Consciousness of the Tathagata, Original Face, Prajna, True Emptiness ...

The Buddha taught two approaches for returning to that true nature. Such Dharma methods as Zen, T'ien T'ai (Tendai or Lotus School) and a division of the Esoteric School enter it through the Door of Emptiness. Other schools, such as the Pure Land School, the Avatamsaka School, the Vinaya (Discipline) School, as well as the Diamond Division of the Esoteric School do so through the Door of Existence.

Therefore, those who deeply understand the prajna truth of Zen, or the meaning of the Ten Mysterious Gates of the Avatamsaka School, all clearly realize that form is no different from emptiness, emptiness is no different from form, form is emptiness, emptiness is form. On the other hand, those who lack thorough understanding will cling to emptiness unless they cling to existence.

However, clinging to existence at least makes the practitioner fear cause and effect, avoid transgressions and perform good deeds, which leads to auspicious rebirth in human and celestial realms -- or in the Western Pure Land

(in the case of diligent practitioners of Buddha Recitation). On the other hand, if he clings to emptiness, he will end up denigrating cause and effect and rejecting the Buddhas and sages. Thus, he will descend, in the future, upon the Three Evil Paths. Therefore, the ancients have cautioned:

"It is better to be attached to existence, though the attachment may be as great as Mount Sumeru, than to be attached to emptiness, though the attachment may be as small as a mustard seed."[78]

The visiting Zen Master of our story did not yet clearly understand the True Mind. Therefore, as soon as he heard that "the Pure Land is Mind-Only, the Self-Nature is Amitabha Buddha," he hastily concluded that our Mind, if pure, is precisely the Pure Land, is precisely Amitabha Buddha -- and that there is no other Land of Bliss nor any Buddha called Amitabha. Such deluded individuals, attached to emptiness, can be found everywhere. In general, they reject the existence of Buddha Amitabha, the Western Pure Land, demonic or celestial realms, or else they say that the Bodhisattva Earth Store (Ksitigarbha) is the Mind-ground-Nature-store and there is no such Bodhisattva as Earth Store.[79]

This is not unlike wearing dark glasses and seeing everything in black. Regardless of how many Dharma talks such practitioners present or how many sutras or commentaries they compose or translate, ultimately they stray, developing the disease of attachment to emptiness.

These individuals are usually vain and conceited, considering themselves intelligent and lofty, while deprecating others as being attached to forms. In truth, when they write commentaries or translate sutras, they have the intention of propagating the Dharma, but, in the end, they vilify the Three Treasures [Buddha, Dharma, Sangha] instead. Not only are they in the wrong, they mislead countless others as well. This is no different from

an incompetent physician who wishes to help sentient beings, but, because his knowledge is not yet up to par, harms many patients instead.

Thus, translating sutras and lecturing on the Dharma do not necessarily bring merits nor constitute propagation of the Dharma, if the author goes astray and misses the intent of the sutras.

Question 5

You have said, Master, that pure and impure are interpenetrating, that each speck of dust is a Land of Ultimate Bliss. Why is it, then, that the Saha World has become an impure world?

Answer

It is due to the karma of sentient beings, which has changed a pure place into an impure one. In the eyes of the Buddha, however, all impurities are pure. In any event, how can Sakyamuni Buddha's Land of True Reward be really impure?

Question 6

I now believe in the lofty and sublime principle of Mind-Only -- all-encompassing and perfectly unimpeded. However, how can people who are still sunk in deluded passion and not yet divorced from evil karma become pure?

Answer

If the Mind is polluted, the realm is polluted; if the Mind is pure, the realm is pure. The *Vimalakirti Sutra* states:

"To be reborn in the Pure Land, you should first purify your Mind; when the Mind is pure, the Buddha lands will be pure as well."

The Pure Land Dharma Door is a wonderful method for achieving purity of Mind. There is no better expedient!

Question 7

Could I please hear your explanation of the general points of the Pure Land method?

Answer

Fundamentally, the Pure Land method does not require any cultivation. It is only because of delusion that cultivation becomes necessary. Moreover, Dharma methods are not, in themselves, high or low. It is only because of the differing natures and capacities of individuals that they have been categorized as such. Sentient beings are at different levels of spiritual development, and therefore, various methods are required. There are, in summary, three basic approaches: 1) Visualization (Real Mark Buddha Recitation), 2) Recitation/Recollection and 3) Sundry Practices.

I. First Method

The first, or Visualization Method, is explained as

follows in the *Meditation Sutra*:

"Every Buddha, ... Tathagata, is One who is a ... [Dharma Realm Body] and enters into the Minds of all beings. For this reason when you perceive the Buddha-state in your Minds, this indeed is the Mind which possesses the thirty-two signs of perfection and the eighty minor marks of excellence. It is the Mind that *becomes* Buddha; indeed, it is the Mind that *is* Buddha. The ocean of true and universal knowledge of all the Buddhas is born of Mind and thought. For this reason ... [you] ought to apply ... [your] Minds with one thought to the meditation on *that* Buddha ..." (*Buddha-Bhasita-Amitâyur Dhyana-Sutra (Meditation on Buddha Amitâyus)* by Kalayasas. New York: American Buddhist Academy Press, p. 25.)

According to the *T'ien T'ai Treatise,*

"The passage beginning from 'Every Buddha, ... Tathagata' refers to all Buddhas.

"The passage beginning with 'you ought to apply your Minds,' etc., refers specifically to meditation on Buddha Amitabha.

"The Dharma Realm Body is the Dharma Body of the Reward Buddha. If the Minds of sentient beings are pure, the Dharma Body reveals itself. Thus, the word 'enter' is used. (This is similar to the brilliant sun; when it rises, its image appears in a multitude of rivers.) This is to indicate that the Buddha Body is free and unimpeded and can manifest itself according to the object. Moreover, the 'Dharma Realm Body' refers to the Buddha Body, appearing everywhere, taking the Dharma Realm as its nature. When the practitioner achieves this Buddha Visualization Samadhi, his understanding and actions [noumenon and phenomena] interpenetrate and become one. This is expressed in the words 'enters into the Minds of all beings.'

"'It is the Mind that *becomes* Buddha' means that the Buddha has always been inherently empty and void. Because the Minds of sentient beings are pure, Buddha exists.

"'Indeed, it is the Mind that *is* Buddha;' Since people might misunderstand what was said previously and think that the Buddha has spontaneously come into existence, the words '*is* Buddha' are used. The word 'becomes' indicates the beginning of visualization, while the word 'is' means that visualization has been accomplished."

Another commentary states:

"To visualize the Buddha's body, you should clearly understand the nature of visualization. That nature is self-enlightenment. Visualization methods are developed from there. Self-enlightenment is the Dharma Realm Body of the Buddhas because what the Buddhas have completely attained is nothing other than the Self-Nature of sentient beings.

"Only when the 'initial enlightenment' is meritorious does 'self-enlightenment' appear. This is the meaning of the words 'the Dharma Body is born of Mind and thought.'

"Moreover, Buddha Amitabha and all Buddhas possess the same Dharma Body, the same wisdom and the same capacities and functions. When the body of Amitabha Buddha is manifested, the bodies of all Buddhas are manifested; when the bodies of the Buddhas are understood, the nature of Amitabha Buddha is revealed. Therefore, the *Meditation Sutra* refers broadly to all Buddhas in order to end in the visualization of Amitabha Buddha.

"From the words 'Dharma Realm Body' on, the Sutra refers to the mutual response between the Buddhas and the practitioner and the 'interpenetration' between understanding and action [theory and practice]."

Commenting on these two explanations, an Elder Master has written:

"Without the first explanation, the above visualization

would not be a meditation on the Buddha. Without the second explanation, the practitioner could misunderstand and think that the nature of sentient beings is different from that of the Buddhas. The two explanations are complementary in elucidating the Visualization method."

II. Second Method

With the second, or Recitation/Recollection method, the cultivator either "recollects" the auspicious features of Amitabha Buddha or recites His name. This method has both a noumenal and a phenomenal aspect. In the *Avatamsaka Sutra*, the Elder Mukata ("Liberation") said:

"If I wish to see Amitabha Thus Come One in the World of Happiness, then as soon as I formulate the intention I see Him ... [I can clearly see all the various Buddhas, their lands and retinues as well as their spiritual powers.] And yet, these Thus Come Ones do not come here, nor do I go to them. [This is so because] I know that all Buddhas and my own Mind are completely like a dream. I know that all Buddhas are like an image or reflection [in the water] ... I know that all the physical characteristics of all Buddhas together with my own Mind, are both like an illusion .. an echo. I realize this as such and recollect and consider this as such -- that all Buddhas I see arise from my own Mind." [Because I clearly understand my Mind as such, I can at will see the Buddhas.] (*Flower Adornment Sutra*, tr. by Tripitaka Master Hsuan Hua. Ch. 39, Part II, p. 104-106.)

An Elder Master commented on the above quote as follows:

"From the first sentence to the words 'Nor do I go to them' [the Buddhas], the Sutra elucidates the truth of Mind-Only. If the practitioner is enlightened to the truth of 'Mind but not Mind,' he immediately enters the True

Thusness Samadhi. When the practitioner truly understands that all realms and marks are illusory, created from the Mind, and awakens to the truth of 'Mind-Only and Mind is Buddha,' then, depending on the object of his thoughts and recollection, there is nothing which is not Buddha.

"The second part of the quote refers to four examples: (1) 'like a dream' stands for the truth of 'neither coming nor going;' (2) 'like a reflection in the water' represents the truth of 'neither leaving nor entering;' (3) 'like an illusion' stands for the truth of 'neither existing nor non-existing;' (4) 'like an echo' means 'neither disintegrating nor amalgamating.'

"The first example indicates that everything is *'Mind-Only;'* the second example shows that, because it is Mind-Only, it is *empty*; the third example indicates that, because it is Mind-Only, it is *false*; the fourth example shows that, because it is Mind-Only, it is the *Middle Way.* These four examples encompass the Four Meditations and include the 'general' and the 'specific,' thus revealing the truth of Mind-Only -- everything has always been perfect and unobstructed. This is the teaching of the *Avatamsaka Sutra.*"

Noumenon or absolute level:

If the practitioner clearly understands this truth and concentrates upon the Buddha's name, free of (1) the Mind of existence and non-existence, (2) the Mind of simultaneous existence and non-existence, (3) the Mind of simultaneous non-existence and non-non-existence, while (4) severing all past, present and future -- this is called "noumenon-recitation." If the practitioner can recite *singlemindedly* in this way throughout the six periods of the day and night (i.e., all the time), without interruption and without developing a single thought, he need not pass through any stage of cultivation but can enter directly into the realm of the Buddhas. This is also called "one-pointedness of Mind (noumenon level)."

Phenomenon or material level:

The *Surangama Sutra* states:

"Moreover, whoever recites the name of Amitabha Buddha, whether in the present time, or in future time, will surely see the Buddha Amitabha and never become separated from him. By reason of that association, just as one associating with the maker of perfumes becomes permeated with the same perfumes, so he will become perfumed by Amitabha's compassion, and will become enlightened without any other expedient means." (Dwight Goddard, *A Buddhist Bible*. Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1970, p. 245.)

Another sutra teaches that:

"Whether he focusses on the Buddha constantly throughout his life, or recites assiduously for three months, or forty-nine days, or one to seven days and nights, or recites only ten times each morning, as long as the practitioner holds the Buddha's name with deep faith and fervent vows, like a dragon encountering water or a tiger hidden deep in the mountains, he will be assisted by the Buddha's power and achieve rebirth in the Pure Land." [A dragon outside the ocean or a tiger without the protection of the forest has but one thought in mind: to return to its environment ... Recitation requires the same singleminded intensity.]

According to the *Meditation Sutra*, even an ordinary being, guilty of the five grave offenses and the ten evil deeds, will be reborn if, at the time of death, he recites the Buddha's name but ten times with utmost sincerity. This is "one-pointedness of Mind (phenomenon level)."

In summary, "one-pointedness of Mind (noumenon level)" refers to the practitioner who thoroughly understands the four meditation truths discussed above and recites the Buddha's name with such a Mind. It is

equivalent to the realm of Empty Wisdom (Wisdom of Emptiness) and leads to the realm of Pure Truth.

"One-pointedness of Mind (phenomenon level)," on the other hand, refers to the practitioner whose Mind is still attached to recitation, one recitation following another without pause, leading to the state of extinction of all sundry thought.

One-pointedness of Mind (noumenon level) is the practice of those of the highest capacities; one-pointedness of Mind (phenomenon level) embraces those of moderate and low capacities.[80]

III. Third Method

The third method is called "Sundry Practices," as the cultivator engages in many practices seeking rebirth in the Pure Land.

A) Thus, in the *Avatamsaka Sutra,* the Bodhisattva Samantabhadra advises and urges the youth Sudhana ("Good Wealth") and the Ocean-Wide Great Assembly to seek rebirth through the Ten Great Vows.[81] These Ten Great Vows are:

"First, worship and respect all Buddhas.
Second, praise the Thus Come Ones.
Third, make abundant offerings.
Fourth, repent misdeeds and hindrances.
Fifth, rejoice at others' merits and virtues.
Sixth, request the Buddha to turn the Dharma wheel.
Seventh, request the Buddha to remain in the world.
Eighth, follow the teachings of the Buddha at all times.
Ninth, accommodate and benefit all sentient beings.
Tenth, transfer merits and virtues universally."

Each Vow contains the clause:

"When the realm of empty space is exhausted, my [Vows] will be exhausted. But because the realm of empty space is inexhaustible, my [Vows] will never end. In the same way, when the realms of living beings, the karma of living beings, and the afflictions of living beings are exhausted, my [Vows] will be exhausted. But the realms of living beings, the karma of living beings, and the afflictions of living beings are inexhaustible. Therefore my [Vows] are inexhaustible. They continue in thought after thought without cease. My body, mouth and mind never tire of doing these deeds." (Master Hsuan Hua, tr. *Flower Adornment Sutra*, Ch. 40, p. 48.)

The practitioner should cultivate these Ten Great Vows with body, mouth and Mind, and without interruption or lethargy. At the time of death, when all family and possessions are left behind and all faculties disintegrate, only these Great Vows will follow close behind, and in an instant, the practitioner will be reborn in the Pure Land.

This constitutes seeking rebirth through the power of vows.

B) Moreover, in the *Maharatnakuta Sutra*, Buddha Sakyamuni told the Bodhisattva Maitreya:

"These Ten Minds cannot be developed by ordinary people, nor those who lack virtue and are beset by afflictions. What are these Ten Minds? They are ... to develop great loving kindness toward sentient beings ...; to develop great compassion ...; to protect the true Dharma of the Buddha without regard for one's life; to develop Supreme Tolerance of the Correct Dharma, without clinging nor grasping; to be still and peaceful, without seeking gain, support nor respect; to seek the Buddha's wisdom at all times ...; to be respectful and reverential toward all beings at all times ...; to avoid

indulging in mundane discussions ...; to plant all good roots ...; to give up attachment to the marks of the Buddhas, while always keeping the Buddhas in mind." (After translation by Saddhaloka Bhikku.)

"These are the Ten Minds of the Bodhisattvas, which enable them to achieve rebirth. For someone to attain one of these ten frames of Mind while seeking rebirth in the Pure Land and yet fail to be reborn is simply impossible."

This sutra passage refers to achieving rebirth through Mind-power.

C) Moreover, in the *Sutra of the Heart of Great Compassion Mantra*, the Bodhisattva Avalokitesvara (Kuan Yin) said to the Buddha:

"Great Honored Teacher! If any sentient being should assiduously recite the Great Compassion Mantra and still descend upon the Three Evil Paths, I vow not to attain Buddhahood. If any practitioner should assiduously recite the Great Compassion Mantra and fail to be reborn in the lands of the Buddhas, I vow not to attain Buddhahood. If any practitioner should assiduously recite the Great Compassion Mantra and not achieve innumerable samadhis and great eloquence, I vow not to attain Buddhahood. If anyone should recite the Great Compassion Mantra and not have all the wishes and hopes of his present life fulfilled, this dharani cannot be called the Great Compassion Mantra! The only exceptions are wishes which are unwholesome and those made when the Mind is not utterly sincere."

Moreover, practitioners who assiduously recite such dharani as the Thousand-Armed Avalokitesvara Mantra, the Rebirth Mantra, ... etc. with utmost sincerity, can all be reborn in the Western Pure Land or other pure lands. This is achievement of rebirth through spiritual power.

D) Moreover, as stated in the *Meditation Sutra*:

"Those who wish to be born in that land [of Ultimate Bliss] must cultivate the three-fold goodness. *Firstly*, they should be filial toward their parents and support them; serve and respect their teachers and elders; be of compassionate heart and abstain from doing harm; and cultivate the ten virtuous actions. *Secondly*, they should accept and hold on to their refuge in the Three Jewels; perfectly observe all moral precepts and not lower their dignity nor neglect ceremonial observances. *Thirdly*, they should awaken in their Minds a longing for Bodhi, deeply believe in the principle of cause and effect, peruse and recite Mahayana sutras and persuade and encourage other practitioners. These three groups of practices are called pure actions ... and they are the efficient causes for the pure actions of all the Buddhas of the three worlds, past present and future." (Kalayasas, *Op. cit.*, p. 10-11.)

This is in reference to achieving rebirth through the power of accumulated merits.

Furthermore, those who perform good deeds, carrying them out to perfection and transferring the merits with a Mind of faith and vows, can all achieve rebirth as well.[82] These meritorious acts include erecting temples, stupas and statues of the Buddhas, worshipping the Buddhas, reciting sutras, adhering to the precepts, burning incense, offering flowers, donating pennants and other decorations to Buddhist temples, making offerings of food to the clergy, practicing charity, etc.).

This is a general outline of the Pure Land method. Since practitioners differ in their vows and practices, and noumenon also differs from phenomena, there are bound to be differences in their perception of the

Buddha and understanding of the Dharma. Their resulting physical attributes and environment are also different. [See Glossary for "noumenon."]

Additional Comments by Dharma Master Thiền Tâm

To achieve rebirth in the Pure Land, the practitioner need not limit himself to Buddha Recitation or visualization, but may engage, inter alia, in any one of the following practices:

*A) Power of vows, such as the Ten Great Vows of the Bodhisattva Samantabhadra (*Avatamsaka Sutra*);*

*B) Mind-Power, such as the Ten Minds of the Bodhisattva (*Maharatnakuta Sutra*);*

C) Spiritual power, such as reciting the Great Compassion Mantra, the Rebirth Mantra, the Thousand-Armed Avalokitesvara Dharani, etc.

D) Power of accumulated merits (such as practicing the Ten Virtues, reciting sutras, building temples, erecting statues ...). Caveat: all the merits must be dedicated to rebirth in the Pure Land.

Nevertheless, the practitioner must engage in these four methods to the point of perfection to obtain results. Since ordinary people cannot easily extinguish heavy karma and afflictions or accomplish difficult, wholesome deeds, we should rely on Buddha Recitation, with its emphasis on other-power, the power of the Buddha. For this reason, Elder Master Yin Kuang has said that "weak and limited sentient beings who achieve rebirth owe it entirely to the compassionate power of the Tathagata." Thus, those who engage in Buddha Recitation today should adopt the Holding the Name method as their main

practice. Other practices such as sutra recitation, chanting of mantras, charity and other good deeds should be considered auxiliary. This is the only safe course.

The first of the three methods explained earlier by Elder Master T'ien Ju is Real Mark Buddha Recitation -- which is difficult for those of moderate and low capacities to follow. The third method, using the power of vows, the Mind, mantras or accumulated merits, holds little hope for ordinary people beset by karmic conditions. It should only be employed as a subsidiary means. Only the second method, Buddha Recitation at the phenomenal level [Holding the Name], can be practiced successfully by everyone.[83]

However, as sentient beings differ in their temperaments and capacities, Master T'ien Ju had to discuss many different methods, from which people could choose. My own comments, on the other hand, are based on the capacities of today's ordinary practitioners.

Question 8

I understand that Sudhana is a Bodhisattva of high capacity who attained perfect, sudden enlightenment in one lifetime. Why is it that the Bodhisattva Samantabhadra did not urge him to seek rebirth in the Flower Store World[84] rather than the Western Pure Land?

Answer

That question was raised in the *Avatamsaka Treatise*, which offers the following answer:

"Samantabhadra's advice derives from various reasons, some of them not readily apparent: 1) because of causes and

conditions; 2) in order to focus Mind and thought; 3) because [rebirth in the Pure Land] does not mean leaving the Flower Store World; 4) because Amitabha is Sudhana's original teacher."

The first two reasons are easy to understand and require no elaboration.

The third reason is that the Buddha lands within the Flower Store World are as numerous as motes of dust; the Western Pure Land, ten billion Buddha lands away from here, is but one of these countless lands.

With respect to the fourth reason, it is taught in one of the sutras:

"Vairocana Tathagata is the teacher of the Flower Store World; Since Buddha Amitabha is the transformation body of Vairocana Buddha, He is no different from Vairocana Buddha -- therefore, it is said that [Amitabha Buddha is Sudhana's] original teacher."

It is also stated in the same sutra:

"The Bodhisattva Samantabhadra, in conclusion, exhorted Sudhana and the Ocean-Wide Assembly to seek rebirth in the Western Pure Land because Sudhana believed in and understood the perfect Dharma Door, had penetrated the wisdom of Manjusri and practiced the deeds of Samantabhadra, and his blessings and wisdom, as well as his understanding of noumenon and phenomena, were consonant with the Dharma Realm. Although he was a sage with a great Mind who had become enlightened to the nature of original wisdom and reached the level of the saints, his powers and capacities were not yet perfected. Therefore, he could not yet enter this evil world and benefit all sentient beings, as the Buddhas could.

"For this reason, the Bodhisattva Samantabhadra exhorted him, along with the Ocean-Wide Assembly, to rely

on the Pure Land and draw close to Buddha Amitabha, so as to achieve Buddhahood swiftly."

Question 9

In discussing Sundry Practices above [Question 7], you said that since practitioners differ in their vows and practices, and noumenon is also different from phenomena, cultivators differ in their perception of the Buddha and understanding of the Dharma. Their resulting physical attributes and environment must also differ. Thus, the premises of the two other methods of Pure Land cultivation (Visualization and Recitation) being different, are there not differences in the results achieved?

Answer

Naturally, the results achieved must differ. Therefore, Elder Master Yung Ming has said:

"Rebirth occurs within nine grades, which are not at the same level. Some cultivators, relying on the transformation realms, see the transformation (manifested) body of the Buddha. Others are reborn in the Land of True Reward and see the true nature of the Tathagata [see Question 4]. Still others must cultivate the Dharma for many eons to attain the fruits of the two vehicles [Arhats and Pratyeka Buddhas]. Others again, barely a night after achieving rebirth, attain the highest Bodhisattva "grounds."

"In conclusion, since those who are reborn are not equal in faculties and practices, some having dull faculties and others keen faculties, some having achieved samadhi and others not, the lotus blossoms will open at different times and the results will be achieved at different rates, taking greatly varying lengths of time."

Another Elder Master has said:

"Although rebirth is divided into nine grades, this is only a generalization. If we go into detail, there are innumerable grades and levels."

Question 10

The Western Pure Land is only a "Common Land of beings and saints," not a "Land of True Reward." Why was it said in the previous question that some sentient beings are born in the Land of True Reward and see the True Nature of the Tathagata?

Answer

Do not think that there is a Land of True Reward, which exists separately, outside the Land of Common Residence! [See middle of Question 4.] You should know that the three other Lands [Lands of Expediency, True Reward, Eternally Tranquil Light] cannot exist separate and apart from the Land of Common Residence -- the difference lies only in the physical attributes (bodies), the environment and the "quality of life." As it is said in the sutras, "Amitabha's body is immensely tall." The ancients have commented that this refers to the Reward Body.

Not only does the Western Pure Land encompass four unequal "Lands," the same is true of other realms. Therefore, an Ancient Master has said:

"This very Saha World contains all four Lands in their entirety. Thus, during the Buddha's lifetime, the Ocean-Wide Avatamsaka Assembly did not "leave" the Jeta Grove in India, yet great Arhats did not hear, see or know about it."

Question 11

If the Saha World contains all four Lands in their entirety, we should just remain here, engaging in step-by-step cultivation. Where is the need to seek rebirth?

Answer

Although this world encompasses all four Lands in their entirety, it belongs to the Common Residence *Defiled* Land. Therefore, practitioners have difficulty extinguishing defiled karma. To escape such defiled karma, the practitioner should seek rebirth in the Common Residence *Pure* Land of the West. Thus, an Elder Master has said:

"The environment and conditions of the Saha World are profoundly impure and evil; the practitioner should achieve at least the level of the Ten Faiths to escape revolving in suffering. The environment and conditions of the Land of Ultimate Bliss are utterly wonderful. Therefore, all who are reborn within the nine grades achieve non-retrogression. Did you not read in the *Lotus Sutra* that some who received instruction from the Buddha Great Pervading Surpassing Wisdom countless eons ago -- as numerous as motes of dust in countless Buddha lands -- are still at the stage of Arhatship today? This is because they keep retrogressing.

"For example, even the Elder Sariputra, who in one of his previous lifetimes had attained the Sixth Abode (Dwelling), still experienced retrogression, not to mention those whose cultivation is perfunctory! Generally speaking, there are many obstructing conditions in this world, so that cultivators easily retrogress."

Therefore, the ancients have said,

"Bodhisattvas who have newly developed the Bodhi Mind are as numerous as flowers on a mango tree or fish eggs, but,

in the end, those who persevere are few and far between."

Anyone who sets his Mind on the Western Pure Land, and relies on the auspicious conditions of that Land, can reach the stage of non-retrogression immediately upon rebirth. This includes even common beings of low capacity.[85] Practitioners should carefully ponder this essential reason for seeking rebirth.

Question 12

There are many Common Residence *Pure* Lands in the ten directions. Why is it that Buddha Sakyamuni specifically directed people to the Western Pure Land and extolled the supremely wonderful conditions and environment of that Land alone?

Answer

The *Amitabha Sutra* states,

"Sentient beings in that Land experience no suffering but only know every kind of joy; therefore, it is called Ultimate Bliss."

The environment and conditions of the Western Pure Land are most exalted. That realm provides sentient beings with many more advantageous circumstances than other pure lands, which ordinary beings in the Triple World cannot fully understand ... Even on a general level, the gap between the auspicious environment and conditions of the Pure Land and the lowly environment and conditions of the Saha World is wide and profound. If we were to delve into them in detail, such differences are so great that they cannot be fully described! However, in general, those differences can be summarized as two factors:

1. The environment of the Western Pure Land is exalted, and can awaken the yearning and serve as a focus for sentient beings to achieve rebirth.

2. The conditions of the Western Pure Land are unfathomable and wonderful and can help those who are reborn to progress easily and swiftly along the path of enlightenment.

For these reasons, although there are many Common Residence Pure Lands in the ten directions, only the Western Pure Land possesses all auspicious conditions in full. This is why sutras and commentaries point toward rebirth in the Western Land.

Question 13

There are countless Buddhas in the ten directions. All right-minded sentient beings can approach and study with them. Why has Amitabha Buddha been singled out among all Buddhas?

Answer

There are three reasons:

1. Because Amitabha Buddha has made forty-eight profound, all-encompassing vows;
2. Because sentient beings in this world have great affinities [causes and conditions] with Him;
3. Because the teachings of Buddha Sakyamuni in the Saha World and Buddha Amitabha in the West are interrelated.

1) Concerning the first reason, the *Longer Amitabha*

Sutra states that in the causal stage (previous lifetimes), Amitabha Buddha made many lofty, all-encompassing vows. The general tenor of these vows is best exemplified in the eighteenth and eleventh vows:

[Eighteenth Vow] "If, after my obtaining Buddhahood, all beings in the ten quarters should desire in sincerity and trustfulness to be born in my country, and if they should not be born by only thinking of me ten times ..., may I not attain the highest enlightenment." (Joji Okazaki, *Pure Land Buddhist Painting,* tr. by Elizabeth ten Grotenhuis. Tokyo: Kodansha, 1977, p. 15.)

[Eleventh Vow] "I shall not attain supreme enlightenment if any sentient being in my land [would still be subject to retrogression and] not certainly achieve supreme enlightenment and realize great nirvana." (Garma C.C. Chang, *A Treasury of Mahayana Sutras,* University Park, Pa: Pennsylvania State University Press, p. 342.)

Thus, it is stated in the *Avatamsaka Treatise:*

"Buddha Amitabha has made profound and lofty vows -- vowing to welcome and guide sentient beings of the Saha World."

2) With regard to the second reason, when Sakyamuni Buddha was still alive, a great many sentient beings, listening to His compassionate teaching, directed their Minds toward Amitabha Buddha. Since Sakyamuni Buddha entered Nirvana, many persons, whether clergy or layman, man or woman, rich or poor, upper or lower class, familiar with the Dharma or not, have recited the name of Amitabha Buddha ... In the *Longer Amitabha Sutra*, Buddha Sakyamuni stated:

"In the days to come, the paths of the sutras will come to extinction. I, with compassion and mercy, will purposely make

this sutra survive for a hundred years. Anybody who encounters this sutra will, according to his wish, surely attain enlightenment." [Quoted in *Shozomatsu Wason: Shinran's Hymns on the Last Age*. Kyoto: Ryukoku University Press, p. xv.]

The *Longer Amitabha Sutra* added further:

"After this sutra is no longer in existence, the Buddha Dharma will entirely disappear from the world. Only the words 'Amitabha Buddha' will remain to rescue sentient beings. Those who disbelieve this and vilify the Buddha's words will sink into the hells and endure all kinds of suffering."

For this reason, the founder of the T'ien T'ai School, the Patriarch Chih I, has said,

"We should know that Amitabha Buddha has great affinities (causes and conditions) with this depraved world."

3) With regard to the third reason, the ancients have said,

"Sakyamuni Buddha manifests himself in the impure world and *subdues* sentient beings through such conditions as filth, suffering, impermanence and obstacles, creating in them a sense of abhorrence so that they will follow the right path. Buddha Amitabha, on the other hand, manifests himself in the Pure Land, *gathers* sentient beings in through such conditions as purity, happiness, permanence and non-retrogression, creating in them the desire to return to the source of truth. In this way, the two Buddhas employ the dual method of subduing and gathering in to propagate the correct Dharma. Their activities of teaching and transformation are thus related.[86]

"Moreover, while preaching the Three Vehicles, Buddha Sakyamuni specially added the Pure Land method, so that, through the help of Amitabha Buddha, those sentient beings

who were still left out could be rescued. Therefore, in Mahayana sutras, Buddha Sakyamuni compassionately recommended and constantly extolled rebirth in the Pure Land."

It is for these three reasons that Buddha Amitabha has been specially singled out among the Buddhas of the ten directions.

Question 14

I now understand the reasons why the Western Pure Land and Amitabha Buddha have been singled out, as well as the concepts of subduing and converting, revulsion and fondness. However, I venture to think that the True Mind has always been equal, clear and even. If there is still revulsion and fondness, then there is still love and hate, grasping and rejection. Are we not still in error?

Answer

You raise this question because you still do not understand the issue in depth. This revulsion and fondness is not the mundane Mind of love and hate, but is rather the common method employed by all the Buddhas of the ten directions, to transform ordinary beings into sages. If there is no revulsion and rejection, how can common mortals be transformed? If there is no fondness and grasping, how can sagehood be attained?

Therefore, in the span of cultivation from ordinary person to sagehood and from sagehood to "Equal Enlightenment," everything is within the cycle of grasping and rejection, revulsion and fondness. Only when the practitioner has attained the highest level of "Wonderful Enlightenment" will he be free of such

feelings and enter the state of "Equal Thusness" [Buddhahood].[87] For this reason, the ancients have said:

"At the beginning, cultivators should have feelings of grasping and rejection, in order to arrive at the point of no grasping and no rejection. When that grasping and rejection have reached the ultimate stage, they will be found to be the same as non-grasping and non-rejection."[88]

Moreover, the Pure Land method was expediently devised by Buddha Sakyamuni and Buddha Amitabha, with Buddha Sakyamuni exhorting people to seek rebirth and Buddha Amitabha playing the role of welcoming and escorting. If the Pure Land cultivator does not have feelings of revulsion and rejection, how can he leave the Saha World? If he does not have feelings of fondness and seeking, how can he be reborn in the Western Pure Land? To achieve rebirth is nothing more than to rely on the auspicious environment of that Land to achieve Buddhahood swiftly. Therefore, such grasping and rejection, revulsion and fondness are of great benefit; how can they possibly be considered liabilities? [See Note 52.]

Question 15

I agree that the doctrine of grasping and rejection is correct and dare not discuss it further. However, I venture to think, is not rebirth in the Pure Land contrary to the Truth of Non-Birth?

Answer

Elder Master Chih I has said:

"The wise, while earnestly striving for rebirth in the Pure Land, also understand that the nature of rebirth is intrinsically

empty. This is true Non-Birth, and also the meaning of 'only when the Mind is pure, will the Buddha lands be pure.'

"The dull and ignorant, on the other hand, are caught up in the concept of birth. Upon hearing the term 'Birth,' they understand it as actual birth; hearing of 'Non-Birth,' they [cling to its literal meaning] and think that there is no rebirth anywhere. Little do they realize that 'Birth is precisely Non-Birth, and Non-Birth does not hinder Birth.'"

It has also been said by a Zen Master:

"If we understand Birth as meaning real birth, we stray in the direction of Eternalism; if we understand Non-Birth as meaning that there is no actual birth, we commit the error of Nihilism. Birth and yet no Birth, no Birth and yet Birth, is truly the 'ultimate meaning.'"

Another Zen Master has said:

"Birth is definitely birth, but returning [to the Pure Land] is in fact non-returning."[89]

The explanations of these three Masters are very clear. I will now give a broader explanation, through the two concepts of "Nature" and "Marks."

From the point of view of Nature (noumenon) the True Mind is wonderful and silent; its nature is inherently unborn (no Birth). From the point of view of Marks, whenever there is a congruence of causes and conditions, the various Marks of Birth and Death falsely appear, as in a dream, from the True Mind. Because Nature is usually manifested through Marks, it is said that Non-Birth is Birth. Since Marks appear as a result of Nature, it is said that Birth is Non-Birth. When we truly understand this truth, rebirth in the Pure Land is rebirth in the nature (state) of Mind-Only; between Birth and no Birth, no contradiction in meaning exists!

Question 16

The doctrine of rebirth is now clear to me. However, how many of today's numerous Buddhist scholars thoroughly understand it? Thus, they all think that the Western Pure Land, ten billion Buddha lands away, is very distant. How can it ever be reached at the time of death? Do you, Master, have any way of clarifying this point?

Answer

That is a most foolish doubt! I have explained many times that there is no land outside the Mind and there is no Mind outside the lands. How is it that you still fail to understand?

However, this error is understandable; it is due to the fact that many people mistakenly consider their Minds to be limited within the narrow confines of their physical bodies. Little do they realize that what they consider as Mind is merely deluded consciousness. In reality, the True Mind of each person is all-encompassing, covering worlds as numerous as the grains of sand in the River Ganges and filling all the empty space in the universe. Therefore, the boundless empty space of the ten directions and the untold number of lands and worlds, as numerous as grains of sand in the River Ganges, are all encompassed and entirely filled by the Mind.

Thus, the ten billion Buddha lands are squarely within our Mind; they are, in reality, not distant but very near! Likewise, rebirth at the time of death is merely rebirth within our own Mind. This is really very easy. Where is the difficulty?

The Treatise *Ten Doubts about Pure Land* [Question 9] states:

"The Western Pure Land is described as being ten billion Buddha lands away from here only with respect to the limited concepts of ordinary people with eyes of flesh and blood, mired in Birth and Death. For those who have attained the pure karma of rebirth, the Mind in samadhi at the time of death is precisely the Mind reborn in the Pure Land ... as soon as the thought [of rebirth] arises, rebirth is achieved. Thus, the *Meditation Sutra* states that 'the Land of Amitabha Buddha is not far from here!' Moreover, the power of karma is inconceivable. In the space of one thought, rebirth in the Pure Land is achieved. There is no need to worry about distance.

"This is analogous to a person asleep and dreaming. Although his body is on the bed, his Mind can travel to any faraway place as though he were awake. Rebirth in the Pure Land is, generally speaking, similar to this example ..."

Some sutra passages state that rebirth is achieved in a finger snap, while others indicate that it occurs within the time it takes to contract and extend one's arm, or within an instant. Therefore, it is stated in one treatise that "in an instant, the practitioner spans ten billion Buddha lands, because the Self-Nature is inherently wonderful." These examples demonstrate, in general, that because the practitioner is reborn within his broad and spacious True Mind, such rebirth is very easy and very near.

Now, let us put aside the all-encompassing features of the True Mind. I shall cite a simple example based on your small, narrow mind of an ordinary being. The [sea] route from China to India, for instance, passes through many countries and covers thousands of miles. Suppose someone who has never set foot in India listens to the

detailed account of another traveller, paying particular attention and carefully memorizing each and every feature. Later on, as he is lying down or sitting up, memories cross his Mind. He recalls the travel accounts and begins to remember which country is so many miles from India and which other country is so many miles away, and how India is finally reached. As he does so, he immediately witnesses scenes from each stage of the journey, and each time his thoughts linger on a particular stage or country, it seems as though he has personally reached that land.

Rebirth in the Western Pure land is no different from this truth. In the span of a finger snap or a single thought, the practitioner has reached it. Where is the difficulty? To reach the Land of Ultimate Bliss without practicing the Pure Land method is, of course, difficult. However, if your Pure Land karma has reached maturity, travelling to the Pure land is very easy. A resolute Mind is all you need to fulfill your aspiration for rebirth. The Buddhas and sages never indulge in misleading words!

Question 17

I realize that without practicing the Pure Land method, it is difficult to be reborn. This is a certainty. However, why is it that depraved and evil common beings can also achieve rebirth at the time of death? I still do not understand this point and have some doubts. I wish, Master, that you would enlighten me on this issue.

Answer

[Rebirth of depraved, evil beings is taught in the *Meditation Sutra*.]

According to the *Treatise on the Meditation Sutra*, the rebirth of depraved, evil beings is due to their recitation of the Buddha's name with utmost sincerity at the time of death, as this leads to the dissipation of karmic obstructions. Therefore, the *Treatise* suggests that Buddha Recitation is the most important condition for rebirth.

As far as I [Master T'ien Ju] am concerned, having studied the Pure Land sutras and commentaries, the conditions for the rebirth of such evil beings may be summarized under three headings.

1) Very strong Mind-power and utterly determined will, which allow the practitioner to overcome the evil karma of an entire lifetime by reciting the Buddha's name for only a short time. This is called the Great Mind. This situation can be compared to that of a soldier surrounded by enemies ready to harm him. In such perilous circumstances, boldly risking his life, he musters his utmost power and strength and thus breaks out of encirclement.

2) Previous or current good karma. Although the person has created evil karma, he has also practiced samadhi during his current lifetime. Thus, at the time of death, when he is reminded by others, he easily achieves concentration. If the dying person has not cultivated samadhi in this lifetime, he must have done so assiduously in a previous life. That good seed has now come to maturity. Therefore, thanks to his previous good karma, once he is counselled by a good spiritual

advisor, he easily achieves rebirth with just ten thoughts of Amitabha Buddha at the time of death.

3) A Mind of utterly sincere repentance. If rebirth is not due to efforts at cultivation in this life nor good karma from previous lives, the cultivator, at the time of death, must have recited the Buddha's name with a Mind of utterly sincere repentance. Thus, Elder Master Yung Ming has said:

"Since the nature of causes and conditions is intrinsically empty, good or bad karma is not fixed. In determining the path of salvation or perdition, we should consider whether the state of Mind is lowly or transcendental [at the time of death]. This is analagous to an ounce of pure gold which is worth much more than a hundred times its weight in cotton wool, or a small, isolated flame, which can reduce a pile of straw, enormous beyond reckoning, to ashes."

It is due to i) one of these three causes and conditions, in addition to ii) the virtues of Amitabha Buddha's name and iii) the power of His Vows, that even the depraved and evil can, at the time of death, overcome the immense weight of their transgressions and be reborn in the Western Pure Land.

Question 18

Living in the evil world of the five turbidities, each sentient being must have committed transgressions. If he has not committed the five grave offenses, he must have been entangled in other transgressions. Suppose a cultivator has not practiced repentance, or, despite having repented, has not yet wiped out all his bad karma. Under these circumstances, if such a practitioner recites the Buddha's name wholeheartedly during the course of his life *and* at the time of death, can

he achieve rebirth?

Answer

All those who cultivate in such a manner can achieve rebirth, thanks to the power of the great, unfathomable Vow of Amitabha Buddha. The sutra *Questions of King Milinda* states:

"For example, if you place a huge block of stone on a boat, because of the 'strength' of the boat, the stone does not sink and can be carried to the other shore. Without the boat, even if you place but a single grain of sand on the surface of the water, it will sink to the bottom of the river."

The huge block of stone stands for the practitioner with heavy karma, while the grain of sand represents the practitioner with only light karma. The boat stands for the vow-power of the Buddha. People who repent and wholeheartedly recite the Buddha's name will be welcomed and escorted back to the Pure Land, however heavy their karma may be. Those who have light karma but do not recite the Buddha's name will, according to their karma, endure suffering and revolve in samsara at the time of death -- like the grain of sand which, unlike the block of stone, sinks because it is not carried by boat.[90]

This is precisely the rationale for the doctrine of "carrying one's karma to the Pure Land" [i.e., being reborn in spite of one's remaining bad karma]. Therefore, it is stated in the *Pure Land Letters*, in the section referring to the four Lands, that "those who are filled with defiled karma can still be reborn in the Common Residence Pure Land."

Take the case of the three notorious men mentioned in Pure Land treatises whose profession was the slaughter of livestock.[91] All three [saw an evil omen

appear] at the time of death, but thanks to their wholehearted recitation of the Buddha's name, they all escaped the karma of hell and achieved rebirth.

Such occurrences are clearly recorded in the *Biographies of Pure Land Sages and Saints.* What are they, if not evidence of the Buddha's power?

I shall cite another example to clarify the matter. Supposing someone has committed an offense under local law and is subject to imprisonment. If he seeks the help of the king, he may obtain deferral of his sentence until such time as he can perform public service instead. Because of the intercession of the king, the local magistrate cannot carry out the sentence, and thus the culprit can proceed directly to the capital without hindrance.[92] Therefore, it is stated in a Pure Land treatise that:

"Sentient beings are reborn in the Pure Land because of the guidance of Sakyamuni Buddha, the welcoming and escorting of Amitabha Buddha and the support and protection of the Buddhas of the ten directions. This is similar to a person who has the opportunity to cross the open seas in a large, sturdy boat, with an excellent, honest guide and favorable winds as well. Thus, he can swiftly reach the other shore. If he is now unwilling to step onto the boat, remaining continuously adrift in this evil world, he has only himself to blame."

Question 19

You said earlier that even ordinary people may reach the stage of non-retrogression. I venture to think that the stage of non-retrogression is limited to those who have no evil karma. Can it be that those who carry their residual karma to the Pure Land also achieve

non-retrogression?

Answer

Merely achieving rebirth in the Pure Land is attaining the stage of non-retrogression. As stated in the sutras:

"Those who achieve rebirth all dwell in correct samadhi."

It is also stated in the *Amitabha Sutra*:

"Sentient beings who are reborn in the Western Pure Land are all at the stage of non-retrogession."

The *Treatise on the Ten Doubts* [Question 6] states that there are five reasons why those who are reborn achieve non-retrogression:

"a) The power of the Buddha's great, compassionate vow embraces and protects them;

b) The Buddha's light [wisdom] always shines upon them, and, therefore the Bodhi Mind of these superior people will always progress;

c) In the Western Pure Land, the birds, water, forests, trees, wind and music all preach the Dharma of 'suffering, emptiness, impermanence and no-self.' Upon hearing this, practitioners begin to focus on the Buddha, the Dharma and the Sangha;

d) Those who are reborn in the Pure Land have the highest level Bodhisattvas as their companions and are free from all obstacles, calamities and evil conditions. Moreover there are no externalists or evil demons, so their Minds are always calm and still;

e) Once they are reborn in the Pure Land, their life span is inexhaustible, equal to that of the Buddhas and

Bodhisattvas. Thus, they can peacefully cultivate the Dharma for countless eons."

The ancients have also said:

"Without a vow to be reborn [rebirth cannot be achieved]; however, with a sincere vow, all achieve rebirth. Without rebirth in the Pure Land [the stage of non-retrogression cannot easily be reached]; however, with rebirth, all achieve non-retrogression."

Question 20

Those who commit evil deeds throughout their lives, not only may take their residual karma to the Pure Land, but may also achieve non-retrogression -- solely by reciting the Buddha's name at the time of death. The vow-power of Buddha Amitabha is unfathomable, truly inconceivable! Can I therefore engage in mundane endeavors, waiting for the time of death to recite the Buddha's name seeking rebirth?

Answer

What a great pity! What you have just said is very deluded and erroneous. Such thoughts are more dangerous than poisoned wine, harmful not only to yourself but also to clergy and laymen alike!

The reason perverse and evil beings manage to recite the Buddha's name at the time of death is that they have "good roots, causes, conditions, merits and virtues" from the past. That is why they are able to encounter good spiritual advisors, believe in them and act accordingly. This is one chance in a million, not something everyone can look forward to. A Pure Land treatise states:

"There are ten types of people who cannot recite the Buddha's name at the time of death:

1. Those who fail to meet spiritual friends and thus have no one to urge them to recite;

2. Those who are oppressed by karmic suffering and lack both peace of Mind and free time to practice Buddha Recitation;

3. Those stricken by sudden illness, which prevents them from actually reciting the Buddha's name aloud;

4. Those who are insane and cannot focus the Mind on invoking the Buddha;

5. Those who meet with sudden death by fire or drowning and lose their calmness and utter sincerity;

6. Those who are suddenly injured by ferocious beasts;

7. Those who encounter evil friends at the time of death, as such friends destroy their faith;

8. Those stricken by fatal illness, who are unconscious when they pass away;

9. Those who are wounded and die suddenly on the battlefield;

10. Those who lose their lives falling from high places."

These ten instances are common occurrences, which can befall anyone, clergy or layman. They are due to previous or current karma and occur suddenly, and so are impossible to avoid.

You are not a sage who has attained the "knowledge of previous lives," and who can thus know in advance whether or not you will encounter karmic retribution at

the moment of death. Neither do you have the faculty of reading other people's Minds nor supernatural vision, to know whether you will die peacefully or not.[93] Thus, if you do not recite the Buddha's name in daily life, how will you react if, at the time of death, you inadvertently meet with one of these calamities?

At such a time, even if a living Buddha or a multitude of good spiritual advisors surround you, they will have no way to save you. Your consciousness will then follow your karma and descend upon the Three Evil Paths, subject to the Eight Adversities and enduring many eons of suffering. Who knows whether you will even be able to hear the Buddha's name as you do now?

Even if you do not meet with these evil conditions, but simply expire after a "mild" illness, at that time the four elements [earth, water, air, fire] separate, your ligaments and bones jerk and retract, Mind and body are aching and in a state of panic, not unlike a turtle being skinned alive or a crab thrown alive into a boiling pot. How can you then recite the Buddha's name?

Even if you die peacefully, without illness, you may not have severed all worldly ties, or you may still be caught up in defiled thoughts. The desire to survive, coupled with the fear of death, disturb your Mind, rendering it perplexed and undecided. In such circumstances as well, you cannot recite the Buddha's name. Moreover, if you are a layman, you have, in addition, unfinished family obligations, unsettled projects and plans, wailing wife and weeping children, along with hundreds of other worries and apprehensions. How can you have the leisure to recite the Buddha's name?

Let us not even talk about the time of death. Even in daily life, if you are afflicted with some mild illness,

you suffer, moaning and groaning endlessly. As you search for a physician or a cure or seek out monks and nuns to recite verses of repentance, hoping for a quick recovery, your sundry thoughts are legion. It is not easy, then, to concentrate the Mind and recite the Buddha's name.

Even under normal circumstances, when you are in good health, you may be afflicted with old age and declining strength, beset by all kinds of worries and sorrows. Keeping the aging body together is a never-ending task; how can you have time for Buddha Recitation?

Even when you have not reached old age and your body is still vigorous, you are still weighed down by mundane preoccupations and have not yet severed worldly thoughts. You run hither and yon, worrying about ten thousand things. With your sea of consciousness so vast, how can you recite the Buddha's name?

Even if you are free of all conditions and entanglements and are determined to cultivate the Dharma, unless you can see through mundane marks, understand them thoroughly, and sever them completely, you will not be in control of yourself when faced with external conditions. Your Mind, then, will move erratically, following the environment. How can you have the peace of Mind to recite the Buddha's name?

Think about it. You cannot even recite the Buddha's name with a proper frame of Mind when you are merely old or sick, nor even when healthy and at leisure if preoccupied with something -- let alone at the time of death!

Moreover, even at this moment you are talking

about engaging in mundane endeavors; are these not utterly deluded words, serious errors of judgement?

Furthermore, worldly careers and undertakings are like a dream, an illusion, a bubble, an echo, existing for but a moment before returning to the void -- they offer no real benefit to the cultivator on the path of liberation. Even if you have built huge, stately temples and monasteries, achieved great influence and high position, established friendships with numerous important persons of status and wealth, feeling deep pride "inside," thinking that you have succeeded on your path of cultivation, little do you realize that you have violated the very admonition of the ancient sages! This is because they have specifically warned:

"Those who have entered the Order should set their Minds and focus on achieving liberation and not be unduly preoccupied with mundane endeavors, as these entail numerous errors. Not only will they fail to see the heavens, the karma of hell has already been created! If the issue of Birth and Death is not resolved, all mundane activities are but the causes of suffering. One day, once their eyes are closed, they will revolve in samsara according to their karma. At that time, they will discover that their past actions have only added chains to their yoke and firewood and charcoal under the 'boiling cauldrons,' the Dharma robe[94] no longer covers their bodies, while the paths of various realms keep changing ad infinitum throughout the eons! "

With these words, those who have set their Minds on liberation should ponder their own lot and be moved to the point of shedding tears! Patriarchs and Elder Masters have earnestly admonished you in this way. They have not enjoined you to engage in mundane endeavors, waiting for the moment of death to recite the Buddha's name!

Do you not know what Zen Master Ssu Hsin ("Dead

Mind") has said:

"In our world, do not those who are extremely wealthy, with houses full of servants and retainers, wish to remain eternally young to enjoy worldly blessings day and night? However, because their lifetimes are limited, old age comes swiftly with the passage of months and years. Death is blind to wealth and nobility, while the power of karma neither respects nor spares the talented and intelligent. At that moment, perturbed as they are by transgressions and evil karma, where are the civilized, leisurely ways of yore? In a world of karmic retribution, repayment and further indebtedness, there is only regret for a dissipated life!

"What has just been alluded to has been witnessed by most of us with our own eyes and ears. Ordinary people usually drag their feet until old age, waiting until they have fulfilled their family obligations before reciting the Buddha's name. However, death waits neither for the old nor the young. In any case, although we may reason this way, how many elderly persons actually practice Buddha Recitation assiduously?"

The ancients have said,

"Do not wait until old age to recite the Buddha's name. Deserted hilltops are filled with the graves of the young!"

They have added further:

"From the time they are young, people seek wives, raise children and are busy in their professions. They must endure the countless vagaries and sufferings of daily life. On their deathbeds, they must leave everything behind, be it family or wealth, to follow their karma only. If their children are filial, they will shed a few tears, burn a few stacks of paper money and invite monks and nuns to recite a few sutras. On death anniversaries, they may prepare a meal in memory of the departed. This is called being filial toward one's parents.

"If, unfortunately, the children are not filial, as soon as

the parents have closed their eyes, head and bones not yet cold, they are already busy fighting over houses and other property. They sue one another and, upon receiving their share, squander it on evanescent pleasures to the point of even forgetting the anniversaries of their parents' deaths. Thus, an entire lifetime ends in such a pitiful way. What is there to look forward to?

"Therefore, the wise should begin practicing Buddha Recitation and cultivating early in life. Children and grandchildren have their own merits and blessings; parents can only help to a certain extent. They should not, for the sake of their children, toil like oxen and horses throughout their lives!"

Here again I quote a few lines by the ancients:

"A cold laugh for the rich family's patriarch. He is busy as can be managing his enterprises. In his storehouses, weevils are in the grain; in his treasuries, the cords on which the coins are strung are rotting away. All day long he holds the scales; ... at night, by lamp light, he figures his accounts. His body is like a puppet. Don't let the strings break, old man!" (J.C. Cleary, *Pure Land, Pure Mind*.)

Elder Master Ssu Hsin took great pains to give you earnest reminders and counsel. Did he ever enjoin you to engage in mundane endeavors and wait for the time of death to recite the Buddha's name?

Therefore, you should bear in mind that the human condition is uncertain and ephemeral, like sparks among stones, or a bolt of lightening illuminating the horizon. Things appear and disappear in an instant; nothing is permanent or lasting. You should understand this thoroughly and take advantage of the fact that you are not yet old and disease-ridden to put aside all mundane concerns and cleanse your body and Mind. Each passing day is a day of Buddha Recitation; each moment is a

moment of cultivation. At the time of death, everything is settled, the western sky is ready as well, its path vast and radiant![95]

Unless you conduct yourself in this way, when conditions and karma meet, the time for regrets will be long gone! You should ponder this most carefully!

Question 21

The words of this deluded monk are greatly mistaken. Alas, they cannot be taken back even if you chase them with a chariot drawn by four mustangs! Listening to what you, Master, have taught, who among us would not experience a shiver? Regretfully, our Minds, while capable of great vigor, are easily prone to retrogression as well. Hearing words of advice and admonition, we bravely redouble our efforts, but when we encounter obstacles, we grow lazy and lax, retrogress and head in a different direction.

Most people would say that the results of Buddha Recitation practice may emerge after death, but at present we can experience only weariness and fatigue, with no practical benefit. Is this not a likely reason why cultivators grow lazy and retrogress?

Answer

Your understanding is still not comprehensive. The sutras say that those who invoke the Buddha's name with utmost sincerity will derive ten great benefits in this very life:[96]

1. Day and night they enjoy the invisible protection of all celestial beings, powerful deities and their

multitudes of retainers;

2. Twenty-five great Bodhisattvas, including the Bodhisattva Avalokitesvara (Kuan Yin) and other Bodhisattvas, constantly keep them in mind and protect them;

3. They enjoy the continuous aid and protection of the Buddhas; Amitabha Buddha emits constant light to gather them in;

4. No evil demons, ferocious dragons, poisonous snakes or the like can harm them;

5. They do not meet with such calamities as drowning, burning or other violent death; nor do they encounter such punishment as being shackled and imprisoned;

6. Previous evil karma is gradually dissipated; the souls of those whom they have murdered in past lives are liberated and no longer seek revenge;

7. They have restful sleep or dream of auspicious events or view the supremely wonderful body of Amitabha Buddha;

8. Their Minds are always joyful and at peace, their complexions clear and bright, their bodies filled with energy and strength; whatever they undertake generally meets with success;

9. They are always honored and assisted by others, and are gladly accorded the respect reserved for the Buddhas;

10. At the time of death, they do not experience fright, as right thoughts manifest themselves; they witness Amitabha Buddha and the Sacred Assembly

bearing the golden lotus dais, to welcome and escort them to the Pure Land, where they will enjoy peace of Mind and happiness forever.

These ten benefits are described by the Buddha himself, as recorded in the sutras. Since Buddha Recitation can bring such benefits in the present life and in the future, it is the most important of all mundane and supra-mundane Dharma methods. Cultivators should, therefore, redouble their efforts and not develop doubts.

Question 22

I no longer have doubts about the Pure Land method, thanks to your repeated teaching. I have also developed correct faith. However, you said earlier that the cultivator should put aside all mundane concerns and cleanse his body and Mind. In this world, everyone lives in different circumstances. Those with leisure time and favorable conditions can follow your advice, but what about those who are beset by countless duties and obligations? How can they cultivate?

Answer

Cultivators who deeply realize the impermanence of the world earnestly seek liberation. They do not neglect Buddha Recitation, regardless of whether conditions are favorable or unfavorable, fortunate or bitter, upsetting or tranquil, pressing or relaxed, or whether they themselves are entertaining, attending to private or official business, or coping with all manner of situations. The ancients have said:

"High mountains cannot obstruct the path of white clouds; dense stands of bamboo cannot stop limpid streams and springs!"

They further added:

"Recite Amitabha Buddha's name in the morning, recite again in the evening. Even if you are as rushed as a flying arrow, do not part from Amitabha Buddha."

The ten thousand scenes are always calm and still; it is only we who are perturbed. If a cultivator truly seeks rebirth and knows how to utilize his Mind, there are no circumstances which can hinder his cultivation.

Nevertheless, those who lack energy and are involved in many worldly affairs should try to find the necessary free time, remain calm in the midst of commotion, and recite the Buddha's name as many times as possible, according to their capacities. They should decide upon the number of utterances, whether 30,000, 10,000, 3,000 or 1,000, and keep to that number each day, without interruption. Those who are extremely busy should follow the Ten Recitations Method[97] each morning, transferring the merits and adhering to that practice throughout life. Then, they, too, can achieve rebirth.

Those who have the time and favorable circumstances, can, in addition to their regular Buddha Recitation sessions, chant mantras or sutras, practice repentance or charity, or cultivate other merits and blessings, according to their capacities and strengths. Whatever virtue they derive from all these practices should be dedicated to rebirth in the Western Pure Land.[98]

Cultivating in this way, they will not only be assured of rebirth in the Pure Land, their grade of rebirth will also be higher.

Question 23

From the beginning, this barbarian monk has heard a great deal about Buddha Recitation, but does not yet fully understand its tenets. He is also not entirely clear about the Ten Recitations Method. Could you, Master, please elucidate these questions?

Answer

Buddha Recitation has several meanings. One is to focus on/visualize the thirty-two auspicious signs, concentrating the Mind so that, asleep or awake, you always see the Buddha.

Another, more commonly employed method is to concentrate exclusively on reciting the Buddha's name, holding fast singlemindedly and without interruption. In this way, the practitioner will see the Buddha in this very life. I notice that most Pure Land followers these days have chosen this Holding the Name method.

The method requires that the Mind be calm, still and undisturbed -- each recitation follows the one before, the Mind focussed on the Buddha's name. While the mouth recites the Buddha's name, the Mind should clearly contemplate each and every utterance, so that each and every word is clear and distinct. During recitation, regardless of the number of utterances, Mind and thought should be utterly sincere and focussed. Only with such singleminded practice can each utterance erase "eight million eons of heavy transgressions." Otherwise, karmic obstructions are difficult to eradicate.[99]

With regard to the Ten Recitations Method, each morning the practitioner should kneel before the altar of the Buddha, or stand erect with palms joined, facing

west. He should recite continuously in one stretch, each stretch counting as one recitation, ten stretches constituting ten recitations. The number of utterances per stretch depends on the length of the practitioner's breath span. He should keep the recitation clear and distinct, in a voice neither too low nor too loud, neither hurried nor leisurely, reciting thus, with one-pointedness of Mind, for ten consecutive stretches. This method uses the breath to gather and focus the Mind; its effectiveness lies in singlemindedness and steadfastedness throughout life, without a day's interruption.

To transfer the merits, the practitioner should, after recitation, with an utterly sincere Mind, make the following vow:

"My Dharma name is ...; I have developed the Bodhi Mind and earnestly take refuge in Amitabha Buddha, seeking rebirth in the Western Pure Land. In the past, You vowed that 'If any sentient being wishing to be reborn in my Land recites my name with utmost sincerity up to ten times, yet does not achieve rebirth, I will not become a Buddha.' I vow to seek the assistance of Your compassionate power to eliminate transgressions and develop merits. I also vow that, when my time of death comes, I will know the day and time in advance and will have eliminated obstructions. I will then be welcomed and escorted by Amitabha Buddha and the Sacred Assembly, swiftly awaken to the Buddha's Way and rescue all sentient beings."[100]

The Ten Recitations Method is an important technique, handed down through the ages. It is widely taught and very helpful to people at large. Pure Land practitioners should follow and apply it.

Question 24

Ancient masters have clearly and carefully taught the appropriate method of cultivation for laymen caught in the net of the secular world. However, how should those who have entered the monastic life, like myself, cultivate?

Answer

I have indicated earlier that there are many methods of cultivation, which can be summarized under three main headings. Each practitioner, following his inclinations, can choose from among these methods, and engage in Buddha Recitation either exclusively or in conjunction with other practices [sutra recitation, bowing, etc.]. The main point to remember is that his Mind must be utterly sincere, earnest and persevering. Results will then come his way -- naturally.

Question 25

Visualization and Mind-Only Recitation seem to be methods reserved for those of the highest capacities. Likewise, the Ten Great Vows of the *Avatamsaka Sutra* and the Ten Minds described in the *Maharatnakuta Sutra* are for practitioners with sharp faculties. They are not fruitful for those who lack the appropriate capacities and faculties!

Judging myself and considering my own capacities and preferences, I have decided just to recite the Buddha's name assiduously. If I have any spare time, I shall add only the practices of repentance and bowing to the Buddha. What are your views on this matter?

Answer

Fine! You now know your own strengths and limitations! What you have just said is, in fact, quite consonant with the doctrine of "exclusive, uninterrupted practice" of Master Shan Tao. That doctrine is summarized below.

A. Exclusive Practice

Sentient beings, for the most part, suffer heavy karmic obstructions. Their Minds and thoughts are coarse and frivolous, confused and agitated. Visualization objects and scenes, on the other hand, are exceedingly subtle and elusive. Therefore, it is difficult to obtain results through visualization.

For this reason, Our Master Sakyamuni, with his great compassion, has advised cultivators to limit themselves to Buddha Recitation. Since recitation is so easy, as long as the practitioner concentrates without interruption, he immediately achieves rebirth. Practicing in this manner throughout their lives, ten cultivators out of ten, indeed, one hundred out of one hundred, will achieve rebirth. Why is this so? It is because:

1. Without sundry conditions, it is easy to have correct thought;
2. The practitioner's longing is consonant with the original vows of Amitabha Buddha;
3. The Buddha Recitation method is not contrary to the Buddha Dharma;
4. The method is in agreement with the Buddha's words.

If cultivators abandon exclusive practice and engage in sundry practices, only three or four out of hundreds of

thousands can hope to achieve rebirth. Why is this so? It is because:

1. Sundry conditions cause the Mind to become agitated and lose correct thought;
2. Sundry practice is not consonant with the original vows of Amitabha Buddha;
3. It contradicts the Buddha Dharma;
4. It is not consonant with the Buddha's words;
5. Recitation is not continuous;
6. The Mind is not constantly filled with gratitude toward the Buddha;
7. The good deeds of the cultivator may be tainted by the desire for fame and profit;
8. A predilection for sundry conditions hinders rebirth in the Pure Land for oneself and others.

B. Uninterrupted Practice

This means that the body bows exclusively to Amitabha Buddha and not to any other sages; the mouth recites the name of Amitabha Buddha exclusively and not sutras or the names of other Buddhas; the Mind thinks exclusively of Amitabha Buddha with no other thoughts intruding.

Each time the karma of greed, anger and delusion arises, causing a break in cultivation, you should repent immediately, in accordance with the transgression, without waiting for the next hour, the next night or the next day. You should do your utmost to hold onto one pure thought, with no other thoughts intruding and no interruptions. This is called uninterrupted practice ...

What has just been described is the doctrine of exclusive, uninterrupted practice of the Patriarch Shan Tao. The essential point of his teaching is that recitation should continue thought after thought without interruption. Another Elder Master has said, as well:

"You should not recite in a disturbed, agitated way, nor should you vow in a perfunctory manner." Elder Master Yung Ming, too, has said:

"The practitioner should singlemindedly put his faith in the Buddha and cultivate with purity throughout his life. Whether seated or reclining, he should face west. Whenever he bows to the Buddha, recites the Buddha's name or makes a vow, he should do so in extreme earnestness, without intruding, sundry thoughts. He should act as though he were on the verge of execution, or in prison, or pursued by enemies, or in danger of drowning or being burned alive. He should singlemindedly seek help, vowing to escape the cycle of danger and swiftly attain Non-Birth, in order to carry on the work of the Triple Jewel, repay the Four Great Debts [see Glossary] and rescue sentient beings. With such an earnest Mind, his cultivation will not be in vain.

"On the other hand, if his deeds do not match his words, his faith is not solid, his recitation is haphazard and he seeks rebirth in this lazy, lethargic manner, it will be difficult for him to encounter good spiritual friends at the time of death. Dragged away by the power of karma, weighed down by pain and suffering, he cannot achieve right thought. Why is this so? It is because present actions are causes, what is received at the time of death are results. Causes should be true for results not to be false, just as an echo which reverberates loud and clear comes from a loud noise, and a straight mirror image requires a straight object."

Question 26

In truth, I have always wanted to cultivate in such a way that thought follows upon thought without interruption. Regretfully, I have not yet achieved one-pointedness of Mind. I cannot even rein in the first thought, or else, the previous perception is difficult to forget, or deluded thoughts arise. I cannot keep my thoughts from being disturbed by circumstances and

conditions; my Mind and feelings are confused and cannot be stilled. Each time I sit down to finger the rosary for a moment, my thoughts have gone in all directions, suddenly travelling millions of miles without my knowledge or awareness.

At times, when I am preoccupied with some problem, I turn it over and over in my Mind for days and days on end, or even for months. It is impossible to rid myself of such tangled thoughts, not to mention doing away with interruptions in recitation! I confess this not only with all humility and shame, but also, upon reflection, in all sorrow! Is there any way to suppress such occurrences? Could you please help?

Answer

Alas! This is the common disease of almost all practitioners. Under such circumstances, if you do not earnestly restrain yourself, it will be difficult to succeed in the practice of exclusive, uninterrupted cultivation. I have heard that the ancients would bitterly reproach themselves for three things, which I shall explain for your edification. You should bear them in mind.

1. Repaying one's obligations

Cultivators have a number of important obligations. Let us put aside temporarily the debts to the Buddhas and our teachers. In your case, as a monk, do you not think that you owe a profound and heavy debt to your parents for giving you life and raising you? Having "left home" and all mundane activities, studying the Dharma far from your birth-place for so many years, you were not aware of the hardships and sufferings of your parents. You did not know of their old age and illness, and so did not take proper care of them. When they died, you either had no knowledge, or, if you were aware

of it, you probably returned home too late. When you were young, in order to provide for you and out of concern for your welfare, your parents, at times, committed numerous transgressions. After death, as they descended upon the path of suffering, they hoped that you would come to their rescue, just as a person might wait for a glass of water to assuage his thirst, or for the pouring rain to cease.

If your cultivation is haphazard, your Pure Land karma will not bring results. Thus, you cannot even save yourself, let alone your parents! In such circumstances, you have not only missed the opportunity to take care of their temporal needs, you are now remiss in your obligations to their souls. You are a most unfilial son indeed! The sutras say: "To be unfilial is to sink into hell." Thus, the Mind of interruption, of failure to cultivate assiduously, is indeed the karma of hell.

Moreover, you do not weave, yet you wear clothing; you do not plough, yet you eat your fill. Living quarters, bedding, food, clothing, medicine, etc. are all provided by Buddhist followers. The ancient masters have often admonished:

"Buddhist followers, out of respect and veneration for the Triple Jewel, parcel out part of their meager family food budget as a donation to monks and nuns. If the latter are not blameless in their cultivation, even an inch of cloth or a grain of rice will have to be paid back in future lifetimes. To repay the favor of your disciples, you should follow the Pure Land path assiduously, to recue yourself and others. If you let even a single intrusive thought arise and fail to persevere, you have become enmeshed in samsara -- endlessly 'borrowing' and 'repaying.' That very intrusive thought is vile karma or the karma of animality."

2. The resolute will

The practitioner should be resolute in order to achieve results. In your case, you have spent a lifetime practicing Zen but have not awakened to its meaning. Nor did you master the subtleties of the Buddhist Canon when you began studying the sutras. Even today, your Mind is not yet empty and calm; your thoughts are still in ferment. At times you want to write poetry, at other times you want to draft commentaries; at times you want to expound the Dharma, at other times you want to indulge in Zen talks. Your thoughts are scattered among three or four areas. The ancients have said:

"A Mind which is still grasping is precisely the karma of Birth and Death. As soon as feelings and thoughts [attachments] arise, you are chained for tens of thousands of eons."

The reason you have not achieved right thought is precisely that your feelings and thoughts are still unfocussed, and such perplexed feelings and thoughts are due to lack of decisiveness. Thus, cultivating with an irresolute Mind is the beginning of rebirth in the Triple Realm.

Furthermore, if a practitioner lacks a determined Mind, he cannot be master of his senses. Because of his unfocussed Mind, he cannot control his body and mouth. As is stated in the sutras:

"I vow that I would rather pour boiling metal in my mouth than allow such a mouth ever to break the precepts and still partake of the food and drink offered by followers. I would rather wrap my body in a red hot metal net than allow such a body to break the precepts and still wear the clothing offered by disciples."

Need we mention that, because the precepts are not

respected, the Mind grows ever more perturbed, and, because of this perturbation, earnest cultivation is interrupted? Therefore, a single thought of interrupting Buddha Recitation is much more than merely the causal karma of red hot nets and boiling metal!

Moreover, if the practitioner's determination is not strong, he cannot fully realize that all mundane dharmas are illusory, and so he easily chases after dreamlike, empty fame and fortune. When fame and fortune are on his side, he grows deluded and attached. If such fame and fortune belong to others, he develops hatred and envy. The ancients have said:

"To be sunk in the pursuit of fame and fortune is to head for the realms of animals and hungry ghosts. To be given to delusive thoughts of love and hate is to be condemned to the firepit and the boiling cauldron. Thus, a thought of interrupting cultivation is precisely the karma of hungry ghosts and hell."

3. Seeking an Auspicious Response

Pure Land followers should strive earnestly for a response. The lives of sentient beings are ephemeral and easily cut short; the ghost of impermanence waits for no one. Your hair is already streaked with white, your face has grown wrinkled. The marks of decay and old age are very clear, and death is but a short time away. Therefore, you should strive to cultivate in earnest, to ensure that some auspicious and reliable signs of rebirth appear.

Thus, in ancient China, Elder Master Hui Yuan of Lu Shan saw the Buddha rub his crown three times. Another Elder Master earnestly recited the Buddha's name and immediately saw Amitabha Buddha emit rays of light and display auspicious marks. In the case of still another Elder Master, each time he uttered the

Buddha's name, the Great Assembly would see a Buddha flying out of his mouth. This was true for hundreds of thousands of his utterances; hundreds of thousands of Buddhas escaped from his mouth, like so many rosary beads, one after another.[101]

Such responses are countless. If you recite Amitabha Buddha's name in earnest, without interruption, it is very easy to see Him. Otherwise, it is very difficult. If you do not see the Buddha, you do not have affinities with Him. Without affinities, it is certainly difficult to achieve rebirth. If you are not reborn in the Pure Land, sooner or later you will descend into the evil realms. Thus, a single thought of interrupting recitation is precisely the karma of rebirth on the Three Evil Paths. You should bear this in mind and ponder it carefully!

The Pure Land practitioner should keep these three admonitions in mind and reflect upon them. He should restrain himself with such earnestness that his Mind becomes inseparable from the Buddha, the Buddha becomes inseparable from his Mind -- Buddha and Mind interpenetrating freely -- so that he may see Buddha Amitabha in this very life. To see the Buddha of the Western Pure Land is to see all the Buddhas of the ten directions; to see the Buddhas of the ten directions is to see the Buddha of the Self-Nature. Once the practitioner has seen the Buddha of the Self-Nature, great capacities and power of expedients will develop naturally. At that time, he can rescue all sentient beings, in accordance with his compassionate vows.

This is called Pure Land-Zen, or Zen-Pure Land. Thus, at that stage, the true meaning of the following lines by the Patriarch Yung Ming is clearly demonstrated:

"To practice both Zen and Pure Land is to be like a tiger with horns. In this life, the cultivator is a leader of men. In the next life, he will be a Buddha or a Patriarch."

You should redouble your efforts and persevere!

The visiting Zen Master, having listened to this teaching, was both shaken and joyful. He remained silent for some time, as though he had just recovered a precious object which had been lost. Elder Master T'ien Ju added, "Zen and Pure Land have always been Non-Dual.[102] If you thoroughly understand, you thoroughly understand them both; if you miss the point, you miss the point of both -- because there are no dharmas outside the Mind, no Mind outside of dharmas. You should make no mistake about this!"

The Zen guest immediately made his obeisance and said, "I am very fortunate to have received instruction from you, Master. I now know the path back to my Self-Nature, the way home." He then slowly took his leave and departed.

Additional comments

"Zen and Pure Land have always been Non-Dual. If you thoroughly understand, you thoroughly understand them both; if you miss the point, you miss the point of both." These words of Elder Master T'ien Ju are truly to the point. The True Mind encompasses an untold number of dharmas, an infinite number of lands. In Zen, it is called "Original Face;" in Pure Land it is called "Self-Nature Amitabha." The Surangama Sutra *states:*

"[Even] the empty space of the ten directions, *born in your Mind*, is but a cluster of clouds in the midst of the vast, blue sky -- not to mention the countless worlds in that very empty space!"

The ancients have said, as well:

"These countless dharmas are the Bodhi Way. Why think of Bodhi (enlightenment) as being so far away?"

Since the True Mind encompasses ten thousand marks and forms, if the Zen practitioner merely understands Zen through the mundane conception of emptiness [i.e., nothing exists] and rejects the existence of the Western Pure Land and the seeking of rebirth, he has not yet truly understood Zen. The reason Master T'ien Ju carefully explained this point on several occasions, was to destroy this "attachment to emptiness."

From the point of view of noumenon, the True Mind is all-illuminating and encompasses countless worlds -- this is referred to as Zen-Pure Land. Countless worlds are reflected in the True Mind, everything is empty, still, illusory and dreamlike -- this is referred to as Pure Land-Zen.[103]

From the viewpoint of skill-in-means and capacities, when the practitioner has awakened to the Original Nature and made the compassionate vow to engage in practices which adorn the Buddha lands and rescue sentient beings -- this is Zen-Pure Land. On the other hand, if he teaches and transforms sentient beings, returning them to their True Nature through Pure Land practice -- this is Pure Land-Zen.

In summary, Zen is Pure Land, Pure Land is Zen. To reject Pure Land is to fail to truly understand Zen; likewise, to reject Zen is to fail to comprehend Pure Land thoroughly. "If you thoroughly understand, you thoroughly understand them both; if you miss the point, you miss the point of both ..."[104]

The Pure Land school accepted the Zen perspective [on Enlightenment] as valid in principle, but questioned how many people could get results by using Zen methods ... The Pure Land method of buddha-name recitation was offered as a simpler method by which average people could make progress toward enlightenment ...

<u>Pure Land, Pure Mind</u>
J.C. Cleary, tr.

Appendix

Excerpts from *Buddhism of Wisdom and Faith*
by Master T. Thien Tam

The Western Pure Land is described as being ten billion Buddha lands away from here only with respect to the limited concepts of ordinary people with eyes of flesh and blood, mired in birth and death.

For those who have attained the pure karma of rebirth in the Pure Land, the Mind in samadhi at the time of death is precisely the Mind reborn in the Pure Land. As soon as the thought [of rebirth] arises, rebirth is achieved. Thus, the Meditation Sutra *states that "the Land of Amitabha Buddha is not far from here!"*

T'ien T'ai Patriarch Chih I
"Ten Doubts about Pure Land"
Pure Land Buddhism, Part I.

I. Doubts Based on Misreading the Sutras

(excerpts p. 83-95)

... There are numerous students of the Buddha Dharma who raise a number of issues about the Pure Land School, based on the teachings in the sutras. I will follow the question-and-answer formula to reply to them.

1. Question:

The *Diamond Sutra* states, "All mundane (conditioned) dharmas are like dreams, illusions, shadows and bubbles." Therefore, the Saha World being illusory, so is the Land of Ultimate Bliss. Why not enter directly into the True Original Mind instead of seeking rebirth in an illusory world?

Answer:

In truth, all the pure and impure lands in the ten directions are like dreams and illusions; however, only when we have attained the "Illusion-like Samadhi" can we see them as illusory and false. If we have not yet reached that stage, we still see them as real, we are still subject to their sway, we still know sorrow and happiness, we still feel uncomfortable during the summer heat and are even bothered by such small things as mosquito and ant bites. Thus, how can we speak about things being illusory? We should realize that the Pure Land method is a wonderful expedient of the Buddha, borrowing an illusory realm of happiness to help sentient beings escape from an illusory realm of great suffering, full of obstructing conditions and dangers. Then, from that happy, peaceful, illusory

realm, cultivation progresses easily, and the ever-silent realm of the True Mind is swiftly attained.

To take an example, in this Saha World of ours, the scenes of stifling family life and noisy downtown business districts are illusory, and so are the scenes of temples and pagodas or mountain wildernesses. However, why is it that cultivators leave the noisy environment of the cities to seek the quiet, sparsely populated landscapes of temples and pagodas hidden in the mountains? Is it not because family life creates many binding ties and bustling urban intersections are not conducive to concentration, while temples and pagodas and mountain wildernesses facilitate cultivation? For this reason, the circumstances of ordinary people are different from those of the saints. For common mortals to put themselves in the place of the saints is far-fetched and unrealistic. We who are still common mortals should follow the path of ordinary people, and cultivate gradually. We should not look with the eyes of saints and comment too far above our level, to avoid the transgression of false speech, which can be harmful.

There was once a Zen Master who thought that the Pure Land was illusory and that reciting the Buddha's name and seeking rebirth was useless. Upon hearing this, Elder Master Ch'e Wu said immediately, "This is a mistake. Bodhisattvas of the seventh stage and below are all cultivating in a dream. Even those Bodhisattvas who have reached the level of Equal Enlightenment are still fast asleep within the great dream of delusion. Only the Buddhas can be honored with the designation Great Enlightened, i.e., those who have completely awakened. When our own body is in a dream, happiness and suffering are to be expected; we experience happiness and still know suffering. How can we consider ourselves awakened from a dream and our environment dreamlike?

"This being the case, how can remaining in the suffering dream of the Saha World compare with returning to the happy dream of the Pure Land? Moreover, the Saha World Dream goes from dream to dream, subject to the laws of karma, eternally revolving and sinking in the cycle of birth and death. The Pure Land Dream on the other hand, is from dream to enlightenment and gradual awakening to the ultimate stage of Buddhahood. Although the illusory dream is the same, the conditions of the dreaming state in the two instances are really different. Thus, it is truly necessary to recite the Buddha's name and seek rebirth!"

From the above explanations of ancient masters, we can see that the need to seek rebirth has been clearly demonstrated. However, the stanza from the *Diamond Sutra* quoted above is still an expedient explanation to help sentient beings abandon the common mortal's concept of attachment.

Going one step further, as stated in the *Great Prajna Paramita Sutra*: "The Buddha explained to those of dull capacities that all dharmas are dreamlike, silent, and still, lest they develop view-attachment. To those of sharp capacities he spoke of the embellishments of the Buddhas, because they are like lotus blossoms, untouched by worldly dusts." For this reason, Subhuti, who, of all the Arhat disciples, was the one most completely awakened to the Truth of Emptiness (devoid of all names and marks) characteristically received a prediction that he would attain full enlightenment in the future under the title of "Name and Mark Buddha." Thus, the sublime truth of *no name or mark* is inseparable from name and mark; all illusory dharmas are the Buddha's dharmas, true and unchanging.

Going still deeper, to the ultimate and perfect stage, as the Sixth Patriarch has said, sentient beings are

originally Buddhas, afflictions are Bodhi (enlightenment), all delusions are the perfect and illuminating essence, truly enlightened, of the womb of the Tathagata (Buddha).

2. Question:

The *Platform Sutra* states, "Without recitation, recitation is correct; with recitation, recitation becomes erroneous." Thus, is not Buddha Recitation deviant and false?

Answer:

The meaning of No-Birth, No-Thought (No-Recitation) has been discussed earlier, but I will give a direct explanation here. "No-Thought" does not mean no Buddha or Sutra Recitation, but rather habitual recitation of the Buddha's name and the sutras with a completely empty Mind, neither seeing nor grasping at the thought that we are the ones doing the reciting. This is called "No-Thought." On the other hand, though we may sit still and at peace, our Minds not thinking of anything, if we are still aware that we are sitting in meditation, this is still "having thought." If we think that No-Thought is not to recite the Buddha's name or the sutras, not to lecture on the Dharma and not to ponder or meditate, then we have turned into wood and stone. While avoiding the error of grasping at forms, we have fallen into the error of "grasping at emptiness," thus going against the very meaning of the Sutra. For this reason, the Sixth Patriarch continued:

"He who is above 'affirmative' and 'negative'
Rides permanently in the white bullock cart
(the vehicle of Buddha)."
(Wong Mou-Lam, tr. "The Sutra of Hui Neng," p. 65. In *The Diamond Sutra & The Sutra of Hui Neng*. Boston, Ma: Shambhala, 1969.)

High-ranking Pure Land monks of old often practiced Buddha Recitation seeking rebirth, but they did not grasp at the mark of such recitation. Therefore, they left behind this stanza:

"To recite is the same as not to recite,
No-Birth is precisely birth,
Not bothering to move even half a step,
The body has reached the city of Great Enlightenment."

However, we have spoken so far of the cultivation practices of individuals of high capacities. Persons of moderate and low capacities should strive to repeat the Buddha's name as many times as possible. While they may still have attachments and see themselves as reciting the Buddha's name and earnestly seeking rebirth, it is still a good thing, because by so doing, they will assuredly achieve rebirth at the time of death and ultimately enter the realm of No-Thought, No-Birth. Where is the worry? Otherwise, not conscious of their own limitations, seeking a direct and lofty way, grasping at the teachings of emptiness while incapable of following the truth of No-Thought -- yet unwilling to practice at the lower level of seeking rebirth through Buddha Recitation -- in the end they achieve neither. They just remain common mortals in the painful cycle of birth and death!

3. Question:

In the *Platform Sutra*, the Sixth Patriarch stated, "Those living in the East who commit transgressions, recite the Buddha's name seeking rebirth in the West. Where do those transgressors living in the West seek rebirth, when they recite the Buddha's name?" Thus, we should only aim at eliminating transgressions. What need is there to recite the Buddha's name and seek rebirth?

Answer:

The Sixth Patriarch and high-ranking Zen Masters were intent on teaching the Mind Only doctrine. Thus, all of their words are based on these tenets, pointing directly to the self-nature, with the Mind as the center. What the Patriarch was really saying is that if the Mind is pure, even though we are in the Saha World, we are emancipated and free. If the Mind is impure, even in the Pure Land we are still subject to the sufferings of birth and death. In truth, for the Pure Land cultivator who understands the Dharma, the Patriarch's words serve only to urge him on, encouraging him to recite the Buddha's name to the level of purity of Mind, devoid of all attachment to forms. The Patriarch did not reject the act of reciting the Buddha's name to seek rebirth. Buddha Sakyamuni, the Buddhas of the ten directions, the great Bodhisattvas and the Patriarchs all recommended seeking rebirth in the Pure Land. The two foremost Indian Zen Patriarchs, Asvaghosha and Nagarjuna, both recommended the Pure Land method. Nagarjuna himself, according to the *Lankavatara Sutra*, was enlightened to the preliminary Bodhisattva stage of "extreme Joy," and was reborn in the Pure Land.

If the Sixth Patriarch had truly intended to reject Buddha Recitation, he would have been criticizing and rejecting Buddha Sakyamuni, the Buddhas, the Bodhisattvas and the Patriarchs, including the very precursors who established his own Zen School, the Patriarchs Asvaghosha and Nagarjuna. How can that be? Therefore, if we were to misunderstand the Sixth Patriarch's words and use those very words to deprecate Buddha Recitation, we would be slandering and sowing the seeds of injustice toward him.

Moreover, every method has two aspects,

noumenon (principle) and phenomena. The above quotation from the Sixth Patriarch is at the level of principle. We must also consider the phenomenal aspect of the path to liberation. Let us restate the question. "Those who commit transgressions in the secular world seek refuge in temples and pagodas, where they cut their hair, become vegetarians, and keep the precepts, looking for a place of purity and tranquillity in order to cultivate. Where do those living in temples and pagodas who transgress go to cultivate?" If we base ourselves only at the level of principle and follow the above argument, then can such actions as entering the monastic life, being vegetarian, and keeping the precepts, including Buddha, Sutra and Mantra Recitation as well as meditation, all be mistakes?

The Pure Land method is similar. In truth, people in the East do not recite the Buddha's name seeking rebirth in the West merely because they have committed transgressions; rather, they do so precisely to take advantage of the excellent conditions of that Land to cultivate and swiftly attain the level of No-Birth and liberation. This is also the goal pursued by those who have committed many bad deeds but who now repent and recite the Buddha's name.

Moreover, the inhabitants of the Western Pure Land cannot commit transgressions because, once reborn, they are surrounded by Buddhas, Bodhisattvas and "morally superior beings;" around them are birds singing the Dharma and music expounding the sutras, while they are free from such daily worries as food, clothing, disease, calamities, hatred and resentment. Thus, they can only progress along the path of cultivation. Where are the conditions for creating bad karma?

In conclusion, we should understand the Sixth Patriarch's words as an explanation and exhortation

based exclusively on pure principle or nature. We should not misunderstand them and use them to reject phenomena and marks. In view of the above, Pure Land cultivators should redouble their efforts and practice to the point of emptiness of Mind. Only then will they be in accord with the intent of the Patriarch.

The Need to Sever Dualistic Attachments

Many similar doubts remain concerning the Pure Land method. This is because cultivators are still attached to "duality," and have not reconciled essence and marks, existence and non-existence, noumenon and phenomena. That is why they use essence to reject marks, noumenon to reject phenomena, emptiness to reject existence, and vice versa, thus creating disputes, doubts and perplexity. Little do they suspect that there is mutual identity between noumenon and phenomena. That is, phenomena are noumenon, noumenon is phenomena. If we divide them and consider them separately, phenomena are not true phenomena, noumenon is not true noumenon. This is true also of essence and marks, existence and non-existence and other dualistic dharmas. For this reason, the *Vimalakirti Sutra* speaks of the non-dual method to destroy this attachment. Non-dual means reconciling all things, penetrating into their very nature; it does not mean "one." This is the true realm of "Mind Only." Any other doctrine based on the Dharma Doors of Existence or Emptiness is merely an expedient for teaching purposes.

The sutras say, "To tire of and abandon 'conditioned' virtues is the action of demons. Yet, to be greedy and attached to transcendental, unconditioned virtues is also demonic action." Ancient sages have also said that "Conditioned dharmas, while illusory, cannot be abandoned if we are to attain the Way. Although unconditioned dharmas are true, if we become attached

to them, our wisdom-nature will not be comprehensive." These words clearly demonstrate that, on the path to enlightenment, unconditioned and conditioned dharmas, noumenon and phenomena are inseparable.

It is also stated in the *Treatise on the Middle Way* that, "Because common sentient beings grasp at external forms, the sutras destroy them with the truth of emptiness. If as soon as they are free of the disease of attachment to existence they fall into the error of grasping at emptiness, there is no medicine that can help them." As the Prajna Paramita Truth of Emptiness sounds lofty and miraculous, when educated people read of this literature, they usually get caught up in the error of "speaking on the level of principle" about everything and look down on those who follow form and marks in their practice. Thus, they create the karma of arrogance and self-importance. While they mouth the Truth of Emptiness, their actions are entirely in the realm of existence, as exemplified by the following couplet:

"Above, their mouths speak about the totally wonderful,
Below, their feet do not part with even a mote of dust."

In the past, high-ranking spiritual teachers often used the Truth of Emptiness to cure the disease of attachment to existence. However, the achievements of these masters were genuine, and their teachings were adapted to the capacities and circumstances of the recipients, bringing them actual benefits. This can be seen from the stories which follow.

There was once a Zen Master who cultivated with extreme diligence. He usually slept in a sitting position rather than lying down, and hardly rested much at all. However, despite engaging in ascetic practices for many years, he still had not become enlightened to the Way. One day, a novice of unknown provenance sought permission to join the Order. This novice was habitually

lazy, to the point where he would often remain in bed even after the bell announcing the early prayer session had been rung. Informed of this, the Master summoned him and scolded him in the following terms, "How is it that you have joined the Order but are still so lazy as to be always lying down? Don't you remember what the rules of discipline say: 'Remaining in bed and failing to arise after hearing the bell will bring the future retribution of rebirth as a snake?'" The novice replied, "You said, Master, that I often lie down and therefore will become a snake. How about you, who are attached to the sitting posture, you will be reborn a toad. What can you ever hope to awaken to?" Immediately after this exchange, the novice disappeared. However, the Master had awakened. As the story goes, the novice was in fact a Bodhisattva, who had assumed the appearance of a novice in order to enlighten the Master.

There is also the story of a well-known Elder Master who sat astride the neck of a statue of the Buddha, splitting and burning wooden Buddhas in order to destroy the concept of attachment to the Buddhas; or the anecdote of Master Fa Ta, who, having recited the *Lotus Sutra* three thousand times, prostrated himself without touching his head to the ground, and was reprimanded by the Sixth Patriarch for not having severed his attachment to the Dharma and to merits and virtues [*Platform Sutra*]; or the story of Master Pei T'a, who, upon achieving the Great Freedom Samadhi, wrote the names of the Bodhisattvas Manjusri and Samantabhadra on his underwear, to destroy the concept of attachment to the Sangha.

Enlightened Masters of the past, with their high level of practice and achievement, could teach the Dharma according to the times and conditions. Moreover, the practitioners of the time included individuals of the highest capacities, so that the teaching

of emptiness was often fruitful. Today, the majority are of low and moderate capacity. In our teaching, we should harmonize theory and practice, nature and marks, so as not to engender doubts, and to keep the Bodhi Mind of the cultivators from retrogressing ... Since the majority of practitioners cannot enter directly into the sphere of True Emptiness in one step, if we reject external forms we would bring on the calamity of "prematurely destroying the boat before stepping onto the shore." How, then, could we escape drowning?

One more point to bear in mind: if we speak about the Truth of Emptiness without having attained that stage (or at least reached a certain level of achievement in our practice) we certainly cannot convert others but will only end up in useless arguments and disputes.

A few years ago, this author witnessed the following occurrence: a young monk versed in the Buddha Dharma was staying at a certain temple to lecture on the sutras. The abbot, who was advanced in age, was diligent in his daily recitation, but used to traditional ways of worship. He took a dislike to the young monk and his free, progressive ways and said to him, "You are teaching and urging people to follow the Way, yet you yourself have never been seen to recite a single sutra nor the Buddha's name. Under these circumstances, how can you serve as a model of cultivation for the four-fold assembly?" The young monk replied, "There are many ways to cultivate. It is not necessary to follow appearances, reciting the sutras and the Buddha's name day and night, as you do, Master, to qualify as a cultivator. The *Diamond Sutra* states:

'Who sees Me by form,
Who sees Me in sound,
Perverted are his footseps upon the Way;
For he cannot perceive the Tathagatha.'
(translation by A. F. Price, "The Diamond Sutra," p. 65. In

The Diamond Sutra & The Sutra of Hui Neng. Boston, Ma: Shambhala, 1969.)

"Take the Sixth Patriarch, who recited neither the sutras nor the Buddha's name, yet attained enlightenment and became a Patriarch." The abbot, at a loss for words, remained silent.

In truth, the abbot was guilty of attachment to appearances and forms; the young monk, on the other hand, while mouthing abstruse principles, actually practiced neither meditation nor recitation. Therefore, he was not only unable to enlighten the abbot, he irritated him unnecessarily.

Of the two types of attachments, to existence and to emptiness, the latter is very dangerous. Both the *Lankavatara* and the *Esoteric Adornment Sutras* state:

"It is better to be attached to existence, though the attachment may be as great as Mount Sumeru, than to be attached to emptiness, though the attachment may be as small as a mustard seed."

Attachment to "existence" leads to mindfulness of cause and effect, wariness of transgressions and fear of breaking the precepts, as well as to Buddha and sutra recitation and performance of good deeds. Although these actions are bound to forms and not free and liberated, they are all conducive to merits, virtues and good roots. On the other hand, if we are attached to emptiness without having *attained* True Emptiness, but refuse to follow forms and cultivate merits. and virtues, we will certainly sink in the cycle of birth and death.

This author, knowing himself to be filled with karmic obstructions and being of low capacity, has no desire to discuss lofty doctrinal questions, lest his

practice not be in accord with his words, thus creating the karma of false speech. However, with a sincere mind, wishing people to eliminate doubts and believe in Buddha Recitation, he has reluctantly provided some explanations. He always compares himself to a handicapped person sitting at the crossroads; although he himself cannot walk, he strives to show others the way, reminding passersby to avoid the dangerous path and follow the wide, even and peaceful Way. He certainly would never entertain the ambition to engage in discussions designed to separate the important from the trivial, nor the true from the false.

II. Caveats: Demons of the Mind

(excerpts p. 196-221)

A) Internal Realms

If we are not diligent and do not exert efforts along the path of cultivation, nothing happens; however, if we are diligent and exert a great deal of effort, we will definitely witness different realms. They either come from within the Mind or are caused by outside sources. I will speak first about the realms originating from the Mind, called internal realms.

Internal realms are also called "realms of the self-Mind" because they do not come from outside, but develop from the Mind. Those who do not clearly understand the truth that "ten thousand dharmas are created by the Mind" think that all realms come from the outside. This is wrong. When the practitioner exerts himself to the stage of mutual interpenetration [of Mind and realms], completely severing external conditions, the seeds of latent dharmas in the Alaya (Store or Eighth) consciousness suddenly manifest themselves. For the Buddha Recitation or mantra chanting practitioner, the power of the Buddha's name or the mantra penetrates deep into the Alaya consciousness, eliciting a reaction from the wholesome or evil seeds therein. The realms that result are very complex and usually appear in dreams, or even when the practitioner is awake and striving to recite the Buddha's name. In Buddhism, this condition is called "changing manifestations of the Alaya consciousness."

Dreaming scenes

If the events or scenes result from evil seeds, the practitioner, in his dreams, may see various species of worms crawling out of his body, or witness himself, each night, removing from his body six or seven insects with many limbs, such as scorpions or centipedes. Or else, he may see various species of wild animals and/or spirits or ghosts. Such realms are innumerable and cannot all be described!

In general, individuals greatly afflicted with greed, who are miserly and wicked, usually see marks of men and women, snakes and serpents and odd species with white features and forms. Those harboring a great deal of anger and resentment usually see tigers and leopards or strange species with red forms and features. Those who are heavily deluded usually see domestic animals, clams, oysters, snails or different species with black forms and features. The above, however, is merely indicative; it does not mean that everything will be exactly as described.

If the scenes in his dreams come from good, wholesome seeds, the practitioner sees tall trees and exotic flowers, beautiful scenery, brightly adorned with nets of pearls. Or else, he sees himself eating succulent, fragrant food, wearing ethereal garments, dwelling in palaces of diamonds and other precious substances, or flying high in open space.

Thus, in summary, all the seeds of the ten Dharma Realms are found in the Minds of sentient beings. If wholesome seeds manifest themselves, sentient beings view the realms of Buddhas, Bodhisattvas, human and celestial beings; if unwholesome karma is manifested, they witness scenes from the wretched three evil paths. If the cultivator has followed externalist ways in lives

past, he usually sees his body emitting electric waves, or his soul leaving the body to roam, meeting deities and the like, to discuss politics and the rise and fall of countries and empires. Or else, when the practitioner's Mind is pure, he will know in his dreams about events that will occur three or four days, or seven or eight months, hence. In general, those who have cultivated in previous lives will immediately see auspicious realms when reciting the Buddha's name. Those with heavy karma, lacking merits and virtues, will usually see evil realms when they begin Buddha Recitation. In time, these evil omens will disappear and gradually be replaced with auspicious omens.

Waking scenes

If the practitioner's efforts have reached a high enough level, there are times during his waking hours when all deluded feelings suddenly cease for a while, body and Mind being at ease and free. At other times, the practitioner may recite for four or five hours but feel that the time was very short, perhaps two or three minutes. Or else, at times during recitation, good, wholesome omens will appear. At other times, unconsciously, his Mind experiences great contentment and bliss. Sometimes, he deeply realizes for a split second that Mind and realm are both empty. At other times, just by hearing or seeing something once, he becomes enlightened to the truth of suffering, emptiness, impermanence and No-Self, severing the marks of self and others. These occurrences are too numerous to be fully described!

A layman was once reciting the Buddha's name while awake in the dark. Suddenly, he saw two types of flowers, red and white, springing up all over the floor, reaching as high as the edges of his bed; meanwhile, other flowers were dropping like rain from the sky.

Another layman, while kneeling down to recite the Buddha's name, suddenly saw a red lotus flower appear before the Buddha's altar, its bud gradually opening up and disappearing after a few minutes.

There was yet another layman who, during recitation, would suddenly see everything around him disappear. In front of his eyes would appear the scene of an immense ocean, calm and still, with no wind or waves whatsoever; countless huge, multicolored lotus blossoms would spring up on the ocean surface. Afterward, the ocean scene would disappear, to be replaced by scenes of mountains, with verdant herbs and flowers, luxuriant century-old trees, and, by and by, a temple complex, sumptuous and magnificent. Then the temple and mountains would disappear, to be replaced by scenes of jewelled nets coming together then drawing apart, coming apart then drawing together again. There are, in general, many such scenes, which the author has heard fellow-cultivators describe and which he has recounted here as examples and evidence.

Visionary scenes as the above, called "internal realms" or "realms of the self-Mind," have their origin in a thought of peace and stillness, or are caused by wholesome seeds generated by Buddha or Mantra Recitation. They appear suddenly and are lost immediately. The practitioner should not be attached to them, thinking that they are real or remembering them fondly. It is a very great mistake to develop nostalgia for them, thinking how ethereal, calm and peaceful, beautiful and well-adorned they were, then day-dreaming about them, unable to forget them and longing for their reappearance. The ancients have criticized such thoughts as "scratching in advance and waiting for the itch." This is because these scenes have their origin in diligent exertion and appear temporarily. They have no true existence. We should realize that when the practitioner exerts a certain degree of effort,

the scenes and features particular to that level will appear naturally.

Take the example of a traveller who views [ever more beautiful] scenery as he passes through different stretches of the road. If he has not reached home, yet develops such an attachment and fondness for a particular scene along the road that he refuses to proceed, his travel will be impeded. He will be helplessly lost in the midst of his journey, not knowing when he will finally return home to rest. The practitioner is like that traveller; if he becomes attached to and fond of temporary realms and scenes, he will never attain the true realms. Were he to dream of them to the point of insanity, he would be destroyed by demons and waste an entire lifetime of practice!

The *Diamond Sutra* states: "Everything in this world that has marks is illusory; to see marks as not marks is to see the Tathagata."

"Everything that has marks" refers here to compounded, conditioned dharmas. Those marks cannot be said either to exist or not to exist, or to be true or false. Delusions arise precisely because unenlightened sentient beings discriminate, become attached and think that these marks exist or do not exist, are real or are false. Even when Zen practitioners, upon entering concentration and witnessing the immense, empty, still, transparent, peaceful and free realm of samadhi, develop a fondness for this realm -- it falls into the category of "having marks." The same is true when these practitioners, once enlightened to a certain lofty, transcendental principle, joyfully grasp at it. Once there are marks, there is delusion.

"To see marks" means to see such marks as auspicious/evil, good/bad, dirty/clean, existent/

non-existent, Buddha/sentient beings, even the realms of the "five aggregates," the "six dusts," etc.

"As not marks" means seeing but neither becoming attached to nor rejecting them -- just letting everything be. Why should we not reject them? It is because marks, while illusory, are not non-existent. This is not unlike the reflection of the moon in the water. Although the reflected moon is not real, this does not mean that there is no illusory mark of the reflection of the moon. Therefore, if we see marks appear while we are cultivating, we should disregard them and redouble our efforts, just like the traveller, who views varied scenery en route but must push forward to reach home quickly.

"To see the Tathagata" is to see the original Buddha Nature, to see the Way.

In summary, all states of mind, from those described above to the state of one-pointedness of mind, belong to the "internal realms." These realms have two aspects: "attainment-like" and "partial attainment." "Attainment-like" realms appear temporarily and disappear immediately. "Partial attainment" realms are those that, once achieved, we have forever, because we have actually attained a part of True Thusness. Regardless of whether it is internal or external, if it is "attainment-like" it is not a True Realm -- because it is merely a full understanding of some of the manifestations of the True Mind.

Practitioners who truly seek liberation should not confuse these aspects, taking attainment-like marks for the True Realm. Attainment-like marks are like a dark, leaden sky which suddenly clears, thanks to the winds which temporarily push away the dark clouds, letting a few rays of sunlight through before the sky becomes overcast again. They also resemble the "mark" of smoke just before the fire that people used to get when they

rubbed two pieces of wood together.

The True Realm can be likened to the bright sunlight in a clear and calm sky. It is like rubbing pieces of wood together and already having fire. However, we should not underestimate attainment-like marks, as they demonstrate the genuine existence of the True Realm. If, from that level, we diligently redouble our efforts, the True Realm is not that far away after all.

B) External Realms

External realms are realms which are not created by the Mind, but come from the outside. For example, some practitioners might see Buddhas and Bodhisattvas appearing before them, preaching the Dharma, exhorting and praising them. Others, while reciting the Buddha's name, suddenly experience an awakening and immediately see the Land of Ultimate Bliss. Some practitioners, in the midst of their pure recitation, see deities and Immortals arrive, palms joined in respect, to circumambulate them or invite them for a leisurely stroll. Still other practitioners see "wandering souls" arrive, seeking to take refuge with them. Yet others, having reached a high level in their practice, have to endure challenges and harassment from external "demons ..."

For example, there was once a layman of rather dull capacities who constantly worshipped the Bodhisattva Avalokitesvara. During a dream one night, he saw the Bodhisattva urging him to meditate on the following stanza, and in time he would achieve enlightenment:

"Great wisdom develops from the Mind,
Where in the Mind can it be found?
To realize all meanings,
Is to have neither past nor present."

A nun of the author's acquaintance was cultivating in the vicinity of Dalat. After her Mantra Recitation session, as she was seated in meditation, she saw two men of noble countenance, dressed like deities or Immortals, respectfully inviting her to scale the mountains and visit their beautiful grounds. In her concentration, she asked them, "How can I go, when the mountains are so high and I am so weak?" One of the men said, "Do not worry, I have a way." He then touched her lightly with something similar to a willow branch and requested her to follow him. She suddenly saw her body glide effortlessly over the grass, and, in no time, she was scaling the mountains. There she witnessed ethereal scenes, with a palace and a tower in the distance. At that very moment, a companion in the back room dropped something with a bang. The nun suddenly awakened from meditation. All scenes had disappeared and her thighs were still aching from overexertion.

The realms and manifestations summarized above are called "external realms." Some might ask, "To see Buddhas and lotus blossoms -- is it not to see demonic apparitions?" Answer: "If cause and effect coincide, they are not 'demonic realms.' This is because the Pure Land method belongs to the 'School of Existence;' when Pure Land practitioners first develop the Bodhi Mind, they enter the Way through forms and marks and seek to view the celestial scenes of the Western Pure Land. When they actually witness these auspicious scenes, it is only a matter of effects corresponding to causes. If cause and effect are in accord, how can these be 'demonic realms?'

"In the Zen School, on the other hand, the practitioner enters the Way through the door of emptiness. Right from the beginning of his cultivation he wipes out all marks -- even the marks of the Buddha or the Dharma are destroyed. The Zen practitioner

does not seek to view the Buddha or the lotus blossom, yet the marks of the Buddha or the lotus blossom appear to him. Therefore, cause and effect do not correspond. For something to appear without a corresponding cause is indeed the realm of the demon. Thus, the Zen practitioner always holds the sword of wisdom aloft. If the demon comes, he kills the demon; if the Buddha comes, he kills the Buddha -- to enter the realm of True Emptiness is not to tolerate a single mark."

A caveat: we are only talking here about novice cultivators. High-level Zen practitioners do sometimes see various marks which are not, however, realms of the demons. When their Minds become enlightened, Zen Masters who have practiced meditation for many eons can see evil as well as transcendental realms, including the pure and defiled lands of the ten directions. This is because all worlds are within the light of the True Mind. On the other hand, despite what we have said earlier, Buddha Recitation practitioners sometimes see various marks which are "demonic realms," as will be explained later.

In short, when we refer to "internal" and "external" realms, we are speaking on the level of beginning cultivators. For those who have attained the Way, Mind is realm, realm is Mind, the ten thousand dharmas and ourselves have but one common nature -- there is no inside or outside at all.

C) Discussion on "Demonic Realms"

As indicated above, sometimes the Buddha Recitation practitioner sees marks and forms which could actually be demonic realms. These are instances where cause and effect do not correspond. For example, while visualizing the physical features of the Buddha, a practitioner may suddenly see the features of a beautiful

woman. - Another cultivator, diligently reciting the Buddha's name in the hope of seeing auspicious scenes of the Pure Land, may unexpectedly see a slum area, with men, women and domestic animals running back and forth in all directions. - Yet another practitioner, hoping to see precious lotus blossoms in the Pure Land, suddenly sees a small cart instead. These are demonic realms, as cause and effect do not coincide.

There are five criteria that can help us determine which events are real and which belong to the demonic realms.

1. Instances where cause and effect do not correspond (such as visualizing one mark but seeing another, hoping to see one realm but seeing another), as well as scenes and realms that do not resemble those described in the sutras, are all demonic realms.

2. Buddhas and Bodhisattvas have pure compassion; therefore, even if they take the appearance of "demons" to test us, we should still feel calm, at peace and pure. Demons, on the contrary, are inherently evil and wicked; thus, even when they take the appearance of Buddhas and Bodhisattvas (i.e., good and moral persons), we still feel agitated, angry and uneasy.

3. The Buddha's light makes us feel calm and refreshed; it has neither shadow nor a blinding effect on the eye. The light of demons, on the other hand, affects our eyes and makes us feel agitated rather than calm and peaceful; it also has shadows, as described in the *Lankavatara Sutra* ...

4. The teachings of the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas are in accord with the sutras and the truth. The words of demons are contrary to the truth and not in line with the sutras' teachings.

5. When an auspicious mark appears, the practitioner who wishes to test it need only concentrate on reciting the *Heart Sutra* with a Pure Mind, or reciting a mantra or the Buddha's name with one-pointedness of mind. If the mark really is auspicious, the more he recites, the clearer it becomes, because genuine gold does not fear fire. If it belongs to the demonic realm, it disappears as he recites, because evil can never infringe upon the true and the auspicious.

We should judge events by all five of the above criteria, not just one or two. This is because there are many celestial demons or externalist deities and Immortals who want to lead us their way and therefore falsely take the appearance of Buddhas and Bodhisattvas preaching the Dharma. Although their cultivation is not the ultimate Way leading to liberation, they possess good karma or a fairly high level of concentration. Thus, their "light" can also make us feel refreshed and peaceful. Moreover, their teachings sometimes encourage the performance of good deeds, keeping the precepts, vegetarianism and Buddha Recitation. However, they diverge from the Buddhist sutras on certain points. Only by exercising careful judgement and understanding the Dharma in depth are we able to know.

For example, certain externalist deities urge vegetarianism and Budhha Recitation, but teach that the sacred words should be visualized as circulating throughout the body -- this, they say, is "turning the Dharma wheel," to release blockages in the energy system. This is the preaching of externalist demons.

There are also demons who take the appearance of Elder Masters and say, "Statues of the Buddha made of bronze and cement cannot vanquish water, because they

sink in water; statues of the Buddha made of wood cannot vanquish fire, because they would burn. Only the Mind-Buddha cannot be destroyed by anything. You need only to cultivate the Mind-Buddha, striving to make it pure; there is no need to cultivate the body and mouth. Therefore, even 'eating meat and drinking wine,' lusting and begetting children, is of no consequence. Cultivating the body and the mouth through maintaining the precepts, vegetarianism, Sutra, Mantra and Buddha Recitation are restrictive, ascetic practices which are of no use and bring no benefit!" This is a typical teaching of some spirits of long years' standing or demons of sexual lust.

There are some types of demon who have reached a fairly high level of attainment and can use their powers of concentration to help the practitioner reach a state of samadhi for a period of seven or twenty-one days. However, their teaching does not lead to ultimate liberation and, in the end, cannot transcend the cycle of ego-attachment.

Ancient masters have said, "when we see demons yet remain undisturbed, the demons self-destruct; when we see ghosts yet remain undisturbed, the ghosts are vanquished." This saying means: if we see demons and ghosts but our Minds are unmoved and unafraid, holding fast to correct thoughts or singlemindedly reciting the Buddha's name, these demons and ghosts cannot hurt us in any way, and will leave of their own accord.

Not only should we act in such a manner when seeing demons, but even when we achieve some results or see auspicious marks during cultivation, we should not be moved to sadness, astonishment or joy. It is as if we lost a diamond at the bottom of the lake and because the water was murky we were unable to recover it despite our best efforts. Now that the water is still and transparent, we have found it. Since the diamond

originally belonged to us, why should we be astonished and happy? If the cultivator's Mind is not calm and peaceful and is overly given to sorrowful thoughts, he will be harmed by the demon of sorrow and cry all the time. If he is given to too much happiness, he will be harmed by the demon of happiness and laugh all the time, as though insane.

Moreover, although the Pure Land practitioner may also hope to see auspicious scenes, he should not long for or dream of them too much, because to recite is already to seek. He should be calm and "seek but not seek, not seek but seek," so as to avoid disturbing his Mind. He should just earnestly recite the Buddha's name and in time, when the power of his recitation is pure, there will be a response and he will witness auspicious realms. To continuously seek and hope for them is deluded thought which brings harm.

Long ago in China there was a layman who had engaged in meditation for some thirty years. One day, he suddenly attained the faculty of transcendental vision. At the beginning, he would see through walls; later on, he could see things within a few dozen miles as clearly as though they were in front of his eyes. Realizing that he had achieved "transcendental vision" he was very astonished and happy! As time went on, he was not only able to "see" but also "hear" the voices of human beings and animals from far away. This is transcendental hearing, which develops after transcendental vision. As time went by, he could see and hear things that occurred within a radius of several thousand miles. Still later, he was able to "predict" future events ... Thus, he "knew" in advance of a war between two neighboring kingdoms and "witnessed" the pitiful sight of countless dead and dying among the populace. He was so moved that he would weep and lament to whomever he met, "A great, violent uprising is going to occur. There will be massacres and utter misery. The people deserve pity

and compassion. How can they be helped?"

At the time, everyone who heard him thought he was insane. Later on, however, war and rebellion did occur as he had predicted. Even when it was over, he continued to go around lamenting. Ancient masters commented: "This is a case of possession by the 'demons of sorrow and sadness.' The cultivator who has reached a certain high level of practice suddenly develops 'transcendental vision.' He should reflect it toward the self-nature, not letting worldly forms and marks move and disturb his Mind. He should realize that these psychic powers have always been in his possession and should therefore not be unduly happy or astonished, considering them strange and wonderful occurrences ..."

D) Various Types of Demons

The author had just finished drafting the previous three sections when he was visited by a Dharma colleague who requested him to elaborate on the different types of demons, for the benefit of fellow-cultivators. In the three previous sections he has, in fact, given a general explanation of the different realms, including those of demons. If the cultivator has understood the main idea, he can keep his Mind undisturbed and counteract all harmful occurrences. However, to comply with the above request, he will describe the different types of demons in greater detail.

"Demons" are called "mara" in Sanskrit. In Chinese, the word is translated as "murderer" because demons usually plunder the virtues and murder the wisdom life of cultivators. "Demons" also represent the destructive conditions (i.e., functions and influences) that cause practitioners to retrogress in their cultivation. Demons can render cultivators insane, make them lose their right thought, develop erroneous views, commit bad karma

and end up sunk in the lower realms.

Those activities which develop virtue and wisdom and lead sentient beings to Nirvana are called Buddha work. Those activities which destroy good roots, causing sentient beings to suffer and to sink in the cycle of birth and death, are called demonic actions. The longer a practitioner cultivates, and the higher his level of attainment, the more he discovers how wicked, cunning and flourishing the demons are. Although there are numerous demons, they can be divided into three types: demons of afflictions, external demons and celestial demons.

A) Demons of afflictions

These demons represent the afflictions of greed, anger, resentment, delusion, contempt, doubt and wrong views. They also include the demons of the Five Aggregates [obstructions caused by our physical and mental functions], the Six Entrances, the Twelve Sense Fields [eyes, forms, ears ...] and the Eighteen Elements. These demons are also called "internal" as they are created by topsy-turvy, delusive states of mind. Therefore, they must be annihilated by the true, enlightened, bright Mind.

The Minds of human beings are easily moved, developing afflictions not only because of their personal karma but also because of the common karma of living together in an environment filled, for the most part, with evil beings. Some cannot resist the attractions of the five dusts and thus fall into evil ways. Others, encountering adverse conditions, grow sad and mournful and lose their determination to progress. Such developments, depending on their severity, render the cultivator despondent, indignant and ill, or worse still, cause him to abandon the Buddhist Order or even to commit suicide out of despair. More harmful still, they create loss of

respect and good will toward other cultivators, sometimes even hatred and avoidance of clergy and lay people alike. Loss of faith in cause and effect, bad karma and, finally, descent upon the three evil paths is the end result.

To counteract these demons, the practitioner should meditate on the fact that all afflictions are illusory, upsetting, suffocating, binding, evil and conducive only to suffering for both himself and others. To eliminate afflictions is to return to the True Mind, which is free and liberated, fresh and tranquil, bright and clear, happy and at peace, transcendental and miraculous. The cultivator should also meditate in the same way on all attachments, from the Five Aggregates to the Eighteen Elements. In the *Lotus Sutra*, the Buddha said, "You should not be greedy and attached to gross and vile forms, sound, smell, taste, touch and dharmas. If you do, they will burn you up." The Bodhisattva Manjusri once asked a female deity, "How do you see the Eighteen Elements?" The deity replied, "They are similar to the eonic fire burning up the whole world." These are words of warning, reminding us to eliminate the demons of afflictions.

If the demons of afflictions (internal demons) are not subdued, they will attract "external demons" which wreak havoc. The ancients have said, "If behind the door there are mean-spirited people, mean-spirited people will arrive at the door; if behind the door there are virtuous, superior people, noble superior people will arrive at the door." As an example, when thieves try to enter a house through the side door, if the owner calmly scolds them in a loud voice, they will naturally be frightened and leave. If, on the other hand, he is terrified and panic-stricken and begs them to desist, he will unwittingly be inviting them into his house.

B) External demons

"External demons" are interpreted as taking the form of various external spirits, ghosts and deities. Once the cultivator has reached a certain level of attainment, he will be subject to demonic disturbances which will put him to the test. External demons can be divided into three groups.

1. Terrorizing Demons

These are ghosts which like to frighten and terrorize people. They usually take the form of tigers, wolves, serpents, snakes or other ferocious beasts or hallucinatory, diabolic apparitions to scare the cultivator. Their forms change ad infinitum. They may have no head or many heads, many hands, many eyes, or a half-human, half-bestial body. They brandish weapons or spit fire. If the practitioner is frightened, he loses his right thought and often goes insane.

Faced with these occurrences, we should reflect that all forms and marks are illusory, and that demons can only destroy the illusory body, not the True Mind. Meditating this way, we should remain calm and unafraid, peacefully concentrating on Buddha or Mantra Recitation, and the demons will retreat of their own accord.

2. Demons of Lust and Attachment

These are a type of demon which excites a range of emotions, from sexual lust to delusive attachment to the five dusts [i.e., this world]. They take the appearance of alluring, nude men and women or of parents, siblings or close relatives, as well as of Buddhas and Bodhisattvas with beautiful, adorned features, in order to entice the practitioner. If he is fond of good food, these demons bring him succulent, fragrant dishes. If he likes

diamonds or gold, they take the appearance of strange animals holding precious stones in their mouths as offerings. They cause whatever the practitioner desires to appear. They can also use their psychic power to lead him into evil samadhi, evil wisdom and eloquence, giving him the mystic power to know the past and the future.

Those who do not understand will mistake these occurrences for evidence that the practitioner has attained enlightenment, and thus believe in and trust him. In reality, however, the cultivator's Mind is upside down, and he spends all his time engaging in errant, demonic practices to deceive the world.

There was a case of a Vietnamese monk who was cultivating at a deserted temple in Laos. In one of his meditation sessions, he saw a group of beautiful, ethereal women, all naked, holding hands and dancing around. The monk, unable to calm his agitated Mind, immediately recited the Buddha's name in all earnestness. Only then did this scene disappear.

Another story: Once there was a monk in China who was practicing meditation. As he was cold and hungry, the thought of food arose in his Mind. He suddenly saw a woman presenting him with an offering of food. The woman knelt, put food in his bowl, and respectfully asked him to eat immediately, before the food grew cold and lost all taste. The monk, being hungry wanted to eat at once, but, remembering that it was not yet noontime, he patiently told her to put the bowl aside for the time being. The woman left, appearing angry and upset. Some time later, at noon, the monk uncovered the bowl to discover that it was full of worms, crawling all around. He then understood that his false thought of food had attracted the demonic apparition. Thanks to his power of concentration, he was able to avoid eating the dirty food and violating the precept against killing.

There was also a case of a Zen monk practicing in the mountains. Lonely and isolated, he had a deluded thought, hoping to have some fellow-cultivators practicing along with him, to make life more bearable. Immediately, an old woman appeared from nowhere, leading two beautiful young girls by the hand, who, she said, lived in the village down in the valley. They had come, they said, to seek guidance in the Way. The monk, unsuspicious, immediately began to give a Dharma talk to the group. One day, after many such visits over a period of time, the old woman respectfully asked that the two girls be allowed to become attendants to the monk and relieve him of his daily chores. The monk, hearing this, became suspicious. He reprimanded the old woman severely and refused the offer. The three women left, apparently angry and ashamed.

The monk, intrigued, followed them discreetly until they disappeared around a bend in the road. When he reached the spot, he found it was a dead end with no habitation or anything else around, except for three very old trees, one big tree and two smaller ones. He thought it over and realized that he had been "tested ..." A fleeting thought occurred to him, that he should cut down the trees, start a bonfire, and burn them up. At that moment, three persons appeared, seeking repentance and begging him to forgive them and spare their lives.

Therefore, the cultivator should remember: when the Mind is still, all realms are calm; when delusion arises, demons are born.

3. Nuisance Demons

This type of demon concentrates on harassing and disturbing the practitioner. There is a certain species of spirits and ghosts, which can be subdivided into many

types, each appearing at a fixed time of the day. In general, each hour has three types of spirits ... For example, during the period between seven and nine in the morning, they take the appearance of dragons, fish and serpent-like creatures ...

In the commentary *Concentration and Visualization in Zen*, a type of demon is mentioned, with a face like a pear-shaped guitar, four eyes and two mouths, which enjoys disturbing cultivators. Waiting for the individual to begin practice, it takes the form of worms and crawls all over his head and face, penetrates into his mouth, nose, eyes and ears, or goes under his armpits or belly to sting him. At other times it shouts loudly into the practitioner's ears, creating a great disturbance and giving him a headache; or it suddenly embraces him tightly. If the practitioner attempts to seize it in return, nothing is there. This nuisance demon also causes scenes of the five dusts to appear, either favorable or unfavorable, or neither favorable nor unfavorable. Such transformations are countless and can cause the practitioner to become agitated. As he does not know what to make of all this, he loses his concentration. The general way to subdue these nuisance demons is to "gather" the Mind in right concentration, or diligently recite mantras or the Buddha's name -- they will then all disappear.

Speaking more broadly, the category of "external demons" also includes demons belonging to cults and other false, quasi-Buddhist sects. According to the observations of this author and many of his colleagues, practitioners who have belonged to cults in this or previous lives but have now converted to Buddhism, as well as those who are themselves Buddhists but who come from families formerly active in other faiths and cults, tend to be bothered by external demons. This is because the cultivation methods of externalists are

within the realm of worldly afflictions and are tainted with pride, ego attachment, power and fame. Therefore, they stick together and do not want people connected with them in some way to follow other teachings.

A case in point is a friend of the author, a Buddhist monk of gentle and peaceful disposition, who was continuously disturbed by externalist demons during his cultivation. Unfortunately, because of his "externalist" past seeds, he did not apply the Buddha Dharma wholeheartedly, but went instead from place to place, seeking help from externalists. In the end, he strayed completely from Buddhism. While taking the outside appearance of a Buddhist monk, he spent all his time practicing the "balancing of body energy currents," and denigrated the practices of bowing to the Buddha and reciting sutras as attachments to forms ... Thus, those who were once affiliated with externalist faiths and later returned to the Buddha Dharma, should reflect on the above examples and be cautious.

C) Celestial Demons

This refers to the type of demon which resides in the Sixth Heaven, also called the Heaven of Free Enjoyment of Others' Emanations. This type of demon possesses merits and blessings and enjoys the highest heavenly bliss in the Realm of Desire [of which our world is but a small part]. They then mistake such happiness and bliss as ultimate, and do not wish anyone to escape from their influence. [Celestial demons stand for lust and power, and take the form of oppression by men of power.]

When a practitioner has attained a fairly high level of cultivation, his Mind Light develops and shines up to the realm of the Sixth Heaven. It is then discovered by the celestial demons, who seek ways to sabotage his cultivation. Such action can take many forms,

threatening or cajoling, or even inducing the practitioner to attain false samadhi, wisdom and spiritual power, with the aim of ultimately deceiving him. These demons take turns watching the practitioner constantly and without interruption, waiting for the opportune moment. If the practitioner has a delusive thought, they pounce on him or steer him toward things contrary to the Way. The practitioner's entire lifetime of cultivation is then over, for all practical purposes.

In his *Treatise on the Awakening of the Faith*, the Patriarch Asvaghosha admonished:

"There may be some disciples whose root of merit is not yet mature, whose control of Mind is weak and whose power of application is limited, and yet who are sincere in their purpose to seek enlightenment; these for a time may be beset and bewildered by maras and evil influences who are seeking to break down their good purpose.

"Such disciples, seeing seductive sights, attractive girls, strong young men, must constantly remind themselves that all such tempting and alluring things are Mind-made, and, if they do this, their tempting power will disappear and they will no longer be annoyed. Or, if they have visions of heavenly gods and Bodhisattvas and Buddhas surrounded by celestial glories, they should remind themselves that these, too, are Mind-made and unreal. Or, if they should be uplifted and excited by listening to mysterious Dharanis, to lectures upon the paramitas, to elucidations of the great principles of the Mahayana, they must remind themselves that these also are emptiness and Mind-made, that in their essence they are Nirvana itself. Or, if they should have intimations within that they have attained transcendental powers, recalling past lives, or fore-seeing future lives, or, reading others' thoughts, or freedom to visit other Buddha-lands, or great powers of eloquence, all of [these] may tempt them to become covetous for worldly power and riches and fame. Or, they may be tempted by extremes of emotion, at times angry, at other times joyous, or at times very kind-hearted and compassionate, at other times the very opposite, or at times

alert and purposeful, at other times indolent and stupid, at times full of faith and zealous in their practice, at other times engrossed in other affairs and negligent.

"All of [these] will keep them vacillating, at times experiencing a kind of fictitious samadhi, such as the heretics boast of, but not the true samadhi. Or later, when they are quite advanced [they] become absorbed in trances for a day, or two, or even seven, not partaking of any food but upheld by inward food of their spirit, being admired by their friends and feeling very comfortable and proud and complacent, and then later becoming very erratic, sometimes eating little, sometimes greedily, and the expression of their face constantly changing.

"Because of all such strange manifestations and developments in the course of their practices, disciples should be on their guard to keep the Mind under constant control. They should neither grasp after nor become attached to the passing and unsubstantial things of the senses or concepts and moods of the Mind. If they do this they will be able to keep far away from the hindrances of karma." (translation by Wei-tao, *A Buddhist Bible*, p. 402-3.)

In summary and as a further generalization, there are only two types of demons: internal and external. Celestial demons are within the category of external demons; however, I have described them separately to alert the practitioner to the dangerous, subtle havoc they can cause. In addition to the demons of afflictions, external demons and celestial demons described above, Buddhist sutras also mention "disease demons" and the "demon of death." A bout of disease will usually wither the practitioner's efforts, while death in the midst of cultivation can make him retrogress. Thus, disease and death are called demons. However, in general, they represent obstacles to the Way that affect the physical body, but they cannot harm and destroy the Bodhi Mind in the true sense of the word "demon." For this reason, they are only mentioned in passing, but not elaborated upon here.

Considering the level of cultivation of today's practitioners, they generally face harassment only from demons of afflictions or external demons. Such cultivators are not advanced enough to arouse opposition from celestial demons. However, should the latter set their minds to destroying someone, that person has little hope of escaping harm, unless his cultivation is exemplary.

In the *Surangama Sutra*, Buddha Sakyamuni, out of compassion for cultivators faced with many dangers along the Way, admonished those who practiced meditation to recite mantras at the same time. This would enable them to rely on the Buddha's power to escape harm from demons and achieve right concentration. Elder Master Yin Kuang has said: "At first glance, it would appear that the *Surangama Sutra* has a different viewpoint from the Pure Land. However, upon closer scrutiny, the Sutra, in its essence, actually praised and commended the Pure Land School. Why is this so? It is because, if even those who have attained the third level of Arhatship can suffer retrogression caused by demons, we can see the crucial importance of Buddha Recitation and rebirth: in the 'gathering' and helping light of the Lord Amitabha Buddha, there is no more danger of demons."

Thus, while treading the Way but not yet reborn, Pure Land practitioners may also encounter demonic obstacles. However, in most cases, this is because the cultivator does not understand the Dharma and is not skillful at reining in his Mind, letting internal demons "spring up," which, in turn, attract external demons. If he can keep his Mind calm and tranquil and, in addition, recite the Buddha's name, external demons will be powerless and afflictions will gradually disappear as well. Thus, for Pure Land practitioners, even if demonic

obstacles appear, they are few in number.

Zen practitioners, on the other hand, face many demonic occurrences because they rely only on their own strength and self-power. A Zen follower should fulfill the following five conditions to be successful: first, he should keep the precepts strictly; secondly, his nature and roots should be "swift" and enlightened; thirdly, he should have a clear understanding of the Buddha Dharma, skillfully distinguishing the correct from the deviant, the true from the false; fourthly, he should be firm and stable in his determination; and fifthly, he should be guided by a good advisor, who has a thorough understanding of the sutras and many years experience in meditation. If the practitioner does not meet these five conditions, he is very easily subject to harm from demons.

The ancients have said that "in Zen practice, there are many opportunities to go astray." Therefore, to be successful in meditation, it is necessary to be a person of superior capacities and intelligence. High-level Zen Masters of the past, in transmitting the Dharma to their disciples would repeatedly warn them: "Do not promise to accept as a disciple anyone who does not have the deepest good roots." These words should serve as proof enough of the above observation.

In the *Treatise on the Awakening of the Faith*, after summarizing the essential points of Mahayana doctrine and explaining the path of cultivation, the Patriarch Asvaghosha added:

"Next, suppose there is a man who learns this teaching for the first time and wishes to seek the correct faith but lacks courage and strength. Because he lives in this world of suffering, he fears that he will not always be able to meet the Buddhas and honor them personally, and that, faith being difficult to perfect, he will be inclined to fall back [retrogress].

"He should know that the Tathagathas have an excellent expedient means by which they can protect his faith: that is, through the strength of wholehearted meditation-recitation on the Buddha, he will in fulfillment of his wishes be able to be born in the Buddha-land beyond, to see the Buddha always, and to be forever separated from the evil states of existence.

"It is as the sutra says: 'If a man meditates wholly on Amitabha Buddha in the world of the Western Paradise and wishes to be born in that world, directing all the goodness he has cultivated toward that goal, then he will be born there.' Because he will see the Buddha at all times, he will never fall back ... [If a cultivator follows this path], he will be able to be born there in the end because he abides in the correct samadhi." (*The Awakening of the Faith / [by] Asvaghosha.* Translated with commentary by Yoshito S. Hakeda. New York and London: Columbia University Press, 1967, p. 102.)

As explained above, diligent Buddha Recitation is a wonderful expedient to escape demonic dangers and swiftly attain right concentration.

While we are still treading the path of Practice, not having reached the stage of Perfect Enlightenment, all methods and schools are expedients: Buddha Recitation is an expedient, and so are Zen and all other methods ... Diligent Buddha Recitation leads to awakening as in Zen; however, the principal goal of the Pure Land School is rebirth ... [Once "reborn," none will ever retrogress and all will ultimately attain Buddhahood and help sentient beings.]

<u>Buddhism of Wisdom and Faith</u>
Chap. V, Sect. 29

Editors' Notes

1. "The Pure Land School is presently the school of Buddhism in China and Japan that has the most followers." (*The Shambhala Dictionary of Buddhism and Zen*, p. 174 and J.C. Cleary, *Pure Land, Pure Mind.*)

Pure Land Buddhism as presented here, based on the three elements of Faith, Vows and Practice, is currently practiced in China, Vietnam, Korea and other countries. In the case of Japan, Pure Land is mainly divided into two branches, the Jodo (Pure Land) School and the Jodo Shinshu (True Pure Land) School. The teachings of the Jodo School (founded by Honen, 1133-1212) are substantially the same as the teachings presented here. In the case of Jodo Shinshu (founded by Honen's best known disciple, Shinran Shonin, 1173-1262, and represented in the United States by the Buddhist Churches of America) major emphasis is placed on faith (which may be defined as Mind).

"The nembutsu [recitation of the Buddha's name] then becomes an expression of gratitude to Amida for the gift of faith that leads to birth in the Pure Land, rather than a meritorious act that can affect rebirth." (*Pure Land Buddhist Painting,* Elizabeth ten Grootenhuis, tr., p. 23.). See Note 59 for a discussion on faith.

2. The Buddha taught countless schools or Dharma methods. Among these methods, Zen, T'ien T'ai, etc. lead to Buddhahood through the Door of Emptiness, while Pure Land and, to a large extent, the Avatamsaka School enter through the Door of Existence. (The *Avatamsaka Sutra*, of course, being encyclopedic and expressing the totality of Buddhism, also contains the

Dharma of Emptiness of the Zen school.) See also Thích Thiền Tâm, *Buddhism of Wisdom and Faith*, Preface.

"Two important facts inherent in Chinese Buddhism are (1) that major doctrinal efforts to understand and classify the Pure Lands were made by thinkers *not included* [emphasis added] in the lineage of Pure Land devotionalism in China, and (2) that the main scriptural sources for those thinkers frequently were *not* the classical Pure land texts ... Interestingly, it was the Vimalakirtinirdesa-sutra [Vimalakirti Sutra] which evoked ... analysis and which also served as the platform for the expression of the Pure Land doctrines of Chih-i." (Michael Saso and David W. Chappell, ed., *Buddhist and Taoist Studies I*, p. 26.)

3. "In Buddhism, there is no cultivation without discipline, concentration and wisdom, and also there is no Dharma without discipline, concentration and wisdom." (Hsu Heng Chi, *What's Buddhism?*, p. 39. See also p. 16-17.)

4. "The Pure Land sutras exhort both monks and laity who aspire for rebirth in Amitabha's Sukhavati to engage in a broad range of practices that include meditation, observances of precepts, virtuous acts, building of stupas, and contemplation." (Kenneth K. Tanaka, *The Dawn of Chinese Pure Land Buddhist Doctrine*, p. 1.) See also this book, p. 55-66 (T'ien Ju, Question 7).

The first Pure Land practitioners, such as Lu-shan Hui-yuan, were actually meditators:

"Hui-yuan ... a fervent devotee of Amitabha Buddha, was fond of using pictures and visual aids for his meditation. His followers are said to have formed the so-called White Lotus Society. 'On the basis of such traditions Hui-yuan is regarded as the founder of the Pure Land School and its First Patriarch.' Meditation was practiced assiduously in his circle of followers in the hope of catching a glimpse of the glory of Amitabha and the other-worldly Pure Land through visions

and ecstasy." (Heinrich Dumoulin, *Zen Buddhism: A History*, p. 67.)

5. The scriptural basis for Pure Land visualization can be found in the *Meditation Sutra*. (See Glossary, "Three Pure Land Sutras."

"Out of concern for future beings who will be without the benefit of the Buddha's revelation, Vaidehi [the Queen to whom the Buddha preached the *Meditation Sutra*] inquires about the way for their rebirth. In response, the Buddha instructs her in the sixteen kinds of contemplations, beginning with contemplation of the setting sun in this Saha world and moving on to the physical dimensions of Sukhavati, such as the ground, trees, and lakes, and to the features of Buddha Amitabha and the Bodhisattvas Avalokitesvara and Mahasthamaprapta. The last three contempations have as their object the nine grades of rebirth that detail people of varying ability and attainment. The instruction on the contemplations constitute the primary subject of the main body of the Sutra." (Kotatsu Fujita, *The Textual Origin of the Kuan Wu-liang-shou Ching*, translated by Kenneth K. Tanaka, p. 150.)

6. "We must also recognize that this discipline, concentration, and wisdom are equivalent to the Dharma-gate of buddha-remembrance. How so? Discipline [precept keeping] means preventing wrongdoing. If you can wholeheartedly practice buddha-remembrance, evil will not dare to enter: this is discipline. Concentration means eliminating the scattering characteristic of ordinary mind. If you wholeheartedly practice buddha-remembrance, mind does not have any other object: this is concentration. Wisdom means clear perception. If you contemplate the sound of the buddha's name with each syllable distinct, and also contemplate that the one who is mindful and the object of this mindfulness are both unattainable, this is wisdom." (Elder Master Zhuhong, 16th century, in *Pure Land, Pure Mind*, translated by J.C. Cleary.)

7. The key word here is "alternative."

"We may take up any Dharma for practice as long as it is agreeable to our interest and inclination, and since every Dharma is perfect and complete, therefore in the course of cultivation, we should not think of changing from one Dharma to another, nor should we think that a certain Dharma may be superior or inferior to the others. As no medicine may be called good or bad as long as it can cure, likewise, no Dharma may be said to be high or low as long as it is adaptable to its followers." (Hsu Heng Chi, *What's Buddhism?*, p. 62.)

8. Some of the twelve ascetic practices for monks and nuns, designed to purify body and Mind, are: to survive on alms; to eat only one main meal a day and refrain from eating after noon time; to wear garments made of rags; to live in cemeteries; to live under trees. Among these practices, the best known are not to eat after noon time and to survive on alms.

9. See the following excerpts:

"In the case of [the Tantric School], the matter is far more serious, since one is bound by certain commitments once the master/disciple link is formed. Even the receiving of a simple initiation puts one under these commitments, so great care must be taken to assess the qualities of a teacher before attending such ceremonies. One is allowed up to *twelve years* [emphasis added] to observe the conduct and examine the qualities of a potential teacher before establishing a master/disciple relationship ... The value of keeping the precepts is self-evident here." (Karma Lekshe Tsomo, ed., *Daughters of the Buddha.* Report of the International Conference on Buddhist Nuns, held in February 1987 under the auspices of the Dalai Lama, p. 325.)

10. See the following comments on this point:

"There is no doubt that this [koan] system is largely artificial and harbors great pitfalls, but the life of Zen runs through it when it is properly handled. To those who pursue it judiciously under a *really competent master*, Zen-experience is possible and a state of *satori* will surely come." (D.T. Suzuki,

An Introduction to Zen Buddhism, p. 110.)

"Concerning Zen Buddhism, no one can deny its great contribution in bringing thousands to direct realization. Zen is emptiness in action, the living prajnaparamita. It is hard to find words to praise Zen adequately. The more one studies and practices Dharma, the more one appreciates and admires Zen. However, without proper guidance and sufficient preparation, Zen can also be dangerous and futile. By misconstruing a pseudo-experience as true enlightenment, one may develop an unwarranted self-conceit. Zen can also induce a devil-may-care attitude and one may eventually lose all ground in one's Dharmic efforts." (Garma C.C. Chang, ed., *A Treasury of Mahayana Sutras*, p. xi.)

"The Pure Land school accepted the Zen perspective [on Enlightenment] as valid in principle, but questioned how many people could get results by using Zen methods. Pure Land teachers granted that Zen might indeed be the 'supreme vehicle,' but insisted that for most people it was too rigorous and demanding to be practical. The Pure Land method of buddha-name recitation was offered as a simpler method by which average people could make progress toward enlightenment ... " (J.C. Cleary, *Pure Land, Pure Mind.)*

11. Degenerate Age. See Glossary, "Dharma-Ending Age."

12. Other-power/self-power. (See also Note 42.)

The issue of other-power (Buddha's power) is often misunderstood and glossed over by many Buddhists. However, it must be pointed out that, in Buddhism, other-power is absolutely necessary if a Bodhisattva is to attain Ultimate Enlightenment. The *Lankavatara Sutra* (the only sutra recommended by Bodhidharma) and the *Avatamsaka Sutra* (described by D.T. Suzuki as the epitome of Buddhist thought) are emphatically clear on this point:

"As long as [conversion] is an experience and not mere understanding, it is evident that self-discipline plays an

important role in the Buddhist life ... but ... we must not forget the fact that the *Lanka [Lankavatara Sutra]* also emphasizes the necessity of the Buddha's power being added to the Bodhisattvas', in their upward course of spiritual development and in the accomplishment of their great task of world salvation." (Daisetz Teitaro Suzuki, tr., *The Lankavatara Sutra*, p. xviii.)

The *Avatamsaka Sutra* states:

"Having purified wisdom and means in the *seventh stage* ...
The great sages attain acceptance of non-origination ...

On the basis of their previous resolution,
the buddhas further exhort them ...:

'Though you have extinguished the burning of
the fire of affliction,
Having seen the world still afflicted, remember
your past vows;
Having thought of the welfare of the world,
work in quest
Of the cause of knowledge, for the liberation
of the world.'"
(T. Cleary, tr. *The Flower Ornament Sutra*, Vol II, p. 86)

For an explanation of the stages of Bodhisattvahood, see Glossary, "Ten Stages."

13. This welcoming and escorting aspect has been compared to an iron being drawn to a powerful magnet.

14. "Pure Land Buddhism refers to a set of beliefs and practices that espouses for its aspirants the realization of the stage of non-retrogression either in the present life or through rebirth in a Buddha land or realm called 'Sukhavati' (Land of Bliss). According to the Pure Land sutras ... Sukhavati lies billions of Buddha lands away in the western direction from this world, the Saha world-realm. The Buddha Amitabha is the transcendent Buddha who presides over the Sukhavati world-realm ...

"According to the *Larger Sukhavativyuha [Amitabha] Sutra*, Amitabha established through his compassionate vows Sukhavati in order to lead sentient beings to Buddhahood. He made the vows as a Bodhisattva, named Dharmakara, and after five Kalpas (aeons) of contemplation followed by innumerable Kalpas of cultivation his vows were consummated. For the past ten Kalpas, Buddha Amitabha has dwelled in Sukhavati and has continuously preached the Dharma ..." (Kenneth K. Tanaka, *The Dawn of Chinese Pure Land Buddhist Doctrine*, p. 1.)

15. See the *Avatamsaka Sutra*, Ch. 20, particularly the "Stanza that Destroys Hell:

> "If people want to really know
> All Buddhas of all time,
> They should contemplate the nature of the cosmos:
> All is but mental construction."
> [i.e., Everything is made from Mind alone.]
> (Thomas Cleary, tr. *The Flower Ornament Sutra*, Vol I, p. 452.)

See also this book, T'ien Ju, Question 4, as well as Note 77.

16. Unlike certain other schools of Buddhism (Zen, Tantric), Pure Land does not stress the role of gurus, roshi or mentors. Rather, the emphasis is on recitation of the Buddha's name and the sutras as well as direct contact and communion with Buddha Amitabha -- Buddha Amitabha being understood as an expression of emptiness or ultimate wisdom.

"Kumarajiva [the famous translator of sutras from Indic languages to Chinese] interpreted Amida Buddha as an expression of sunyata [emptiness] and recommended nembutsu [Buddha Recitation] as a means of realizing sunyata or ultimate wisdom, prajna." (Allen A. Andrews, "Nembutsu in Chinese Pure Land Tradition," in *The Eastern Buddhist*,

October 1970, p. 20.)

17. On the subject of existence and emptiness, an ancient Zen Master has said:

"If we refer to existence, then
Everything from the smallest mote of dust exists;
If we refer to emptiness,
This whole, wide world and everything in it are empty."

See also a related comment:

"All phenomena are like bubbles in an ocean. They have no genuine existence ... Everything, including samsara and nirvana and sentient beings and Buddhas, is illusory. All sages, Bodhisattvas and Buddhas are like flashes of lightning. You can *see* lightning, just as you can witness the power of and functions of Bodhisattvas and Buddhas, but if try to *grasp* lightning, or attach to the idea that Buddhas and Bodhisattvas have concrete existence or self-nature, then you are wasting your time." (Master Sheng-yen, *The Sword of Wisdom*, p. 225.).

*See also this book, Chih I, Question 8.

18. On the meaning of Amitabha Buddha as Mind Only, see the following:

"From the *ultimate* standpoint, the Pure Land is not to be taken as an existent place, in the way ordinary beings are predisposed to understand it. The admonition against such a view of the Pure Land is found in the following passage: 'A foolish person in hearing *birth* in the Pure Land understands it as *birth* and in hearing *non-birth* understands it as *non-birth*. He thus fails to realize the identity of birth and non-birth and of non-birth and birth' ... Having said that, however, the Pure Land proponents acknowledge that the capacity of ordinary, unenlightened people is such that they have no choice but to regard the Pure Land as ontically existent ... The objective presentation of the Pure Land accords with the emotional and intellectual make-up of ordinary beings whose capacity affords only a literal understanding of the sutra description ... Only

through their relationship with the Pure Land of form can the ultimate reality be realized.

"But the question remains as to how beings are able to realize enlightenment through *grasping at forms* of Pure Land, which strikes as being antithetical to the fundamental Buddhist practice. T'ao-Ch'o [a Pure Land Patriarch] argues: 'Although this is grasping onto form, such grasping does not constitute binding attachment. In addition, the form of the Pure Land being discussed here is identical to form without defilements, form that is true form ... It is like lighting fire on top of ice. As the fire intensifies, the ice melts. When the ice melts, then the fire goes out ...' According to this explanation, an ordinary being is able to engage the ultimate realm without that person fully understanding the ultimate nature. This process skillfully uses the form (rooted in truth) to transcend form in order to enter the formless. When the formless is attained, the previous attachment to form disappears ..." (Kenneth K. Tanaka, "Where is the Pure Land?" in *Pacific World*, Fall 1987.)

19. As stated in the *Heart Sutra:*

"O Sariputra, form does not differ from the Void, and the Void does not differ from form. Form is the Void, and Void is form; the same is true for feelings, conceptions, impulses and consciousness." (Sutra Translation Committee of the United States and Canada, tr., *The Buddhist Liturgy,* p. 45.)

20. See this book, T'ien Ju, Question 17.

21. The operative word here is one-pointedness of Mind, or singlemindedness. See also the following passage:

"All the training of the monk in the zendo, in practice as well as in theory, is based on this principle of 'meritless deed.' (D.T. Suzuki, *Introduction to Zen Buddhism*, p. 132.)

22. Buddha Recitation, like the use of kung an in Zen, is a poison to destroy the poison of false thinking ... It is like fighting a war to end all wars. According to

the Pure Land School, however, recitation of the Buddha's name contains an additional element: the practitioner by association absorbs some of the merit of the Buddha himself. See the following passage, with reference to the Bodhisattva Avalokitesvara (Kuan Yin), one of the Three Pure Land Sages:

"Some of us may ask whether the effect of [evil] karma can be ... [changed] by repeating the name of Kuan-Yin. This question is tied up with that of rebirth in Sukhavati [the Pure Land] and it may be answered by saying that invocation of Kuan-Yin's name forms another cause which will right away offset the previous karma. We know, for example, that if there is a dark, heavy cloud above, the chances are that it will rain. But we also know that if a strong wind should blow, the cloud will be carried away somewhere else and we will not feel the rain. Similarly, the addition of one big factor can alter the whole course of karma ...

"It is only by accepting the idea of life as one whole that both Theravadins and Mahayanists can advocate the practice of transference of merit to others. With the case of Kuan-Yin then, by calling on Her name we identify ourselves with Her and as a result of this identification Her merits flow over to us. These merits which are now ours then counterbalance our bad karma and save us from calamity. The law of cause and effect still stands good. All that has happened is that a powerful and immensely good karma has foreshadowed the weaker one ...

"If we want to go deeper, we may say that this identification with a Bodhisattva also means that a Bodhisattva identifies Himself with us. When this occurs, there is not only the mere transference of merit, but the non-discriminate, infinite, unqualifiable Compassion of all the Bodhisattvas coming into us, lifting us, as it were, right up into Nirvana." (Lecture on Kuan-Yin by Tech Eng Soon - Penang Buddhist Association, c. 1960. Pamphlet.)

23. "In principle, all canonical texts are able to satisfy the spiritual needs of all Buddhists, whether Eastern or Western,

but, in practice some texts appeal more strongly to Buddhists of one kind of temperament, or one kind of spiritual aspiration, than they do to those of another. This is the main reason for the vast extent of the canonical literature, which may be regarded as one and the same Dharma in varying degrees of expansion and contraction, concentration and dilution, rather than as a collection of separate teachings. The canonical literature is like the pharmacopoeia. All the different drugs and medicinal preparations which are listed in the pharmacopoeia have one and the same object, the restoration of the sick person to health, but some drugs and medicinal preparations are suited to the cure of one kind of disease and some to the cure of another.

"The sick person does not have to swallow the entire contents of the pharmacopoeia. In the same way, it is not necessary for the individual Western Buddhist, any more than for the individual Eastern Buddhist, to study and put into practice the entire contents of the Buddhist canonical literature. What he has to do is to find out which canonical text, or which collection or selection of texts, is best suited to his individual spiritual needs, and then devote himself to the concentrated and intensive practice of the teachings contained in those texts -- of course, without any diminution of his reverence for the canonical literature as a whole." (Sangharakshita, *The Eternal Legacy*, p. 277-278.)

24. An interesting parallel can be found in the fact that the first of the Ten Stages of Bodhisattvahood (see Glossary) is the Stage of Extreme Joy.

"Here, standing on the stage of extreme joy of [Bodhisattvas], one is filled with extreme joy, filled with calm, filled with happiness, filled with ebullience ... One becomes extremely joyful thinking of the buddha [reciting the Buddha's name], of the buddha's teaching ... Thus thinking, the [Bodhisattva] gives rise to extreme joy. Why? Because that is what happens to all fears with the [Bodhisattva's] attainment of the stage of joy -- fears such as fear of not surviving, fear of ill-repute, fear of death, fear of states of misery, fear of intimidation by groups ... thus all fears and terrors are

removed." (Thomas Cleary, tr. *The Flower Ornament Sutra*, Vol II, p. 15.)

25. It would appear that there is a need for Buddhism to broaden its appeal and be of benefit to all classes of society, while adhering closely to its core teaching (do not what is evil, do what is good, keep your Mind pure). Buddhism is not merely intellectual; it is, above all, practical -- it is praxis. See also the following passage, which expresses the Pure Land position, albeit to a somewhat extreme extent:

"*First*, we are householders, who work to survive, provide, and live. Our main concern is to support and maintain the family. We are deeply bound to all the problems of human existence. Rather than cutting away or limiting attachments, we make them grow continuously. We cannot help but make attachments grow. *Second*, to hear the teaching is really a limited possibility. In this kind of life, it is not really possible for us to escape or understand the bonds of life ... Because of our lifestyle, it becomes impossible [sic] to conceive of Enlightenment in this life. Our life condition is such that the cause and effect of Enlightenment cannot be fulfilled by our own efforts ..." (H. Yamaoka, *Jodo Shinshu: An Introduction*, p. 36.)

26. "In later popular Buddhist religion, which consisted mainly of the Amida ... [School], Zen -- by nature somewhat elitist -- was able to carry on only at the cost of denying some of its elements." (Heinrich Dumoulin, *Zen Buddhism: A History*, p. 287.)

27. Even when the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas are depicted as providing material assistance to the believer, this is always viewed as an "expedient means" -- the ultimate goal is to lead the believer to Enlightenment.

28. "Making a vow to attain birth in the Pure Land signifies a fundamental reorientation of the believer's motivations and will. No longer is the purpose brute survival, or fulfillment of a social role, or the struggle to wrest some satisfaction from a

frustrating, taxing environment. By vowing to be reborn in the Pure Land, believers shift their focus. The joys and sorrows of this world become incidental, inconsequential. The present life takes on value chiefly as an opportunity to concentrate one's awareness on Amitabha, and purify one's mind accordingly." (J.C. Cleary, tr., *Pure Land, Pure Mind.*)

29. Triple Realm, five turbidities. See Glossary.

30. "In Buddhist teachings ... a person who is not enlightened is -- by definition -- 'ill' ... The healing process is the conversion of suffering into the aspiration to attain enlightenment." (Raoul Birnbaum, *The Healing Buddha,* p. xiv.)

31. Non-Birth. See Glossary. This important term has been rendered in various ways.

This treatise, *Ten Doubts about Pure Land*, was first translated by Leo Pruden under the title "The Ching-t'u Shih-i Lun," in *The Eastern Buddhist*, May 1973. He employed the expression "insight of non-arising." Charles Luk, in his translation of the *Vimalakirti Sutra* used the term "patient endurance of the uncreate."

32. Bodhi Mind. See Glossary for this major concept.

33. Evil life. This Saha World is called evil in Pure Land sutras because it is filled with the five depravities (corruptions, filths), such as the filth of views, when all sorts of wrong views prevail, and the filth of passions, when desire, hatred and other defilements are predominant ...(after Garma C.C. Chang).

"Shariputra: you should be aware that in this evil age of five corruptions [depravities], I did this difficult thing: I obtained the Highest Perfect Knowledge. For the sake of the whole world I preach this Dharma, which is difficult to believe in. This is extremely difficult." (Hozen Seki, *Amida-kyo*, p. 74.)

34. Also called *Prajnaparamita Treatise.*

35. See the related passage from the *Vimalakirti Sutra:*

"As the Lord Buddha declares: 'It is not possible for one who is himself bound to deliver others from their bondage. But one who is himself liberated is able to liberate others from their bondage.'"(Robert Thurman, *The Holy Teaching of Vimalakirti*, p. 46.)

36. In citing this passage from the Patriarch Chih I, Master Thích Thiền Tâm tempered it by adding:

"Nevertheless, considering the responsibility and the compassionate Mind of the cultivator, we should not completely reject all attempts to save sentient beings in our current life. In truth, however, our present altruistic attempts can only be within the framework of 'according to one's means and conditions.' This is not unlike the case of someone who, having fallen into the river of delusion, tries his best to reach the shore, and at the same time shouts out, exhorting others to do likewise." (*Buddhism of Wisdom and Faith*, Section 14.)

37. Non-Birth. Also translated as "non-arising," "non-origination."

38. Two Truths. See Glossary.

39. A key concept in Buddhism: everything is ultimately Mind-made (see Note 77).

40. Question 2 is presumably asked by a Zen Monk. Thus, the Patriarch Chih I gave his paradoxical, Zen-like answer. D.T. Suzuki quotes the Zen Patriarch Fa Yen as follows:

"The sutras preached by the Buddha during his lifetime are said to amount to five thousand and forty-eight fascicles; they include the doctrine of emptiness and the doctrine of being; there are teachings of immediate realization and of

gradual development. Is this not an affirmation?

"But, according to [Zen Master Yung Chia in his *Song of Enlightenment*], 'there are no sentient beings, there are no Buddhas; sages as numerous as the sands of the Ganges are but so many bubbles in the sea; sages and worthies of the past are like flashes of lightning.' Is this not a negation?

"O you, my disciples, if you say there is, you go against [Yung Chia]; if you say there is not, you contradict our old master Buddha. If he were with us, then how would he pass through the dilemma? ... If you confess your ignorance, I will let you see into the secret. When I say there is not, this does not necessarily mean a negation; when I say there is, this also does not signify an affirmation. Turn eastward and look at the Western Land; face the south and the North Star is pointed out there!" (D.T. Suzuki, *Introduction to Zen Buddhism*, p. 65.)

"The critic will be inclined to call Zen absurd, confusing, and beyond the ken of ordinary reasoning. But Zen is inflexible and would protest that the so-called common sense way of looking at things is not final, and that the reason why we cannot attain to a thoroughgoing comprehension of the truth is due to our unreasonable adherence to a 'logical' interpretation of things. If we really want to get to the bottom of life, we must abandon our cherished syllogisms, we must acquire a new way of observation whereby we can escape the tyranny of logic and the onesidedness of our everyday phraseology ... This is because Zen has come to the definite conclusion that the ordinary logical process of reasoning is powerless to give final satisfaction to our deepest spiritual needs." (D.T. Suzuki, *Introduction to Zen Buddhism*, p. 58.)

41. Another key concept in Mahayana Buddhism, particularly popular with the Avatamsaka School.

42. See following quote:

"Invisible assistance -- provided by the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas of Healing -- can be a potent aid in this process [of elimination of the three poisons of lust, anger and

delusion]. This assistance often is described as stemming from the force of their fundamental vows, which they made when they dedicated their lives to spiritual work. The vows to heal all beings and alleviate various sufferings served as special motivating factors in their spiritual development. Upon fruition of their spiritual work ... they then truly became able to fulfill these vows." (Raoul Birnbaum, *The Healing Buddha*, p. xv.)

*See also Note 12.

43. In the *Encyclopedia of Buddhism*, Vol. I, G.P. Malalasekera quoted a Japanese author who found two hundred texts referring to Amitabha Buddha and His Pure Land (thirty-one of the texts are in Sanskrit).

44. Rebirth through other-power is, in effect, rebirth through emphasis on other-power, not exclusive reliance upon it.

45. The purpose of seeing the Buddha is to be able to hear his teaching directly, rather than through intermediary sources such as sutras, commentaries, etc. Moreover, if cultivators are reborn in the Pure Land, as is said in the *Surangama Sutra*:

"They will never be far from the Buddha, and their Minds will awaken by themselves, without the aid of expedients. A person who has been near incense will carry a fragrance on his person ..." (Master Hsuan Hua, tr.)

46. The *Perfection of Wisdom Treatise* states:

"The Pure Land is not included in the Triple World ... It is the Bodhisattva Dharmakara's special karma which brought this about. It exists extra-phenomenally and so we can call it subtle." (T'an-Luan as quoted in Roger J. Corless, "Pure Land and Pure Perspective," *The Pure Land*, December 1989.)

47. To enlightened persons, everything reminds them

(speaks) of the Dharma; thus, the metaphor of the birds, rivers, etc. speaking the Dharma. This is also a poetical way to describe rebirth among like-minded practitioners -- among the "transcendental Sangha." (Sangha = fraternity of monks and nuns.)

48. Buddhist sutras were written some twenty centuries ago, when the monastic order was mainly (though not exclusively) composed of monks. Therefore, the word actually used in the text, "women," may, in this context, be understood as "seductive beings" rather than "female persons."

"When investigating feminine imagery in Buddhist literature, it is important to keep in mind the social and cultural setting within which the teachings were given. The original texts themselves present a range of variant images, not contradictory in an absolute sense, but speaking to different audiences and to beings of different propensities. One point to be noted, for example, is that many of the discourses in these early texts were aimed at helping celibate males break through attachments to the female form. Had the Buddha been addressing celibate females, the defects of the male form would have been similarly elaborated." (Karma Lekshe Tsomo, *Daughters of the Buddha*,, p. 22.)

49. See this beautiful account of the meeting between the Pure Land Patriarch T'an Lun (then a Taoist) and the famed translator/monk Bodhiruci:

"T'an Lun (488-554), seeking immortality, travelled about China obtaining teachings from various noted sages, including the Taoist master T'ao Hung-ching. Eventually (ca. 530) he met with the Indian Buddhist teacher Bodhiruci: 'T'an Lun opened the conversation by saying *"Is there anything in the Teaching of the Buddha which is superior to the methods for obtaining immortality found in this country's scriptures on the immortals?"*

'Bodhiruci spat on the ground and said, *"What are you saying? There is no comparison! Where on this earth can you find a method for immortality? Suppose that you can obtain youth in your old age, and never die: even having done that, you would still be rolling*

around in the triple world!"

'So he gave him the *Meditation Sutra* and said, "*These are the recipes of Amitabha Buddha: if you rely on his practices, you will be liberated from samsara.*" (Raoul Birnbaum, *The Healing Buddha,* p. 241.)

50. See Thomas Cleary, Op. cit., p. 303-304. (Celestial drum = antidote.)

51. The second part of this question deals with the issue raised in the *Rebirth Commentary* (second century, a.d.) as to whether women and certain other groups of people can be reborn in the Pure Land. Master Chih I answers strongly in the affirmative and cites the *Meditation Sutra*, which was preached expressly for Queen Vaidehi and her five hundred female attendants, all of whom ultimately achieved rebirth in the Pure Land.

52. This concept, *disgust* versus *joyfulness*, is an important one and constitutes a key expedient in Pure Land Buddhism. It is based on a mixture of wisdom (Visualization of the decaying body is wisdom ...) and faith (in the vows of Amitabha Buddha).

*See also Notes 10 and 88.

53. See the following passage from the *Vimalakirti Sutra:*

"The sage Vimalakirti discussed the experience of illness at great length ... With many visitors assembled to inquire after his health, the infirm sage took the opportunity to speak out against the human body and its limitations.

"'O, virtuous ones, the wise do not rely upon the body. It is like a mass of froth which cannot be grasped, like a bubble which bursts in an instant. The body is like a flame arising from the thirst of love ... like a shadow, appearing as a result of karma. It is like an echo, responding to causes and conditions ... The body does not act of itself; but it is spun around by the force of the winds of passion.'

"His own face gaunt and creased by illness, vividly impressing upon visitors the transitory nature of earthly existence, Vimalakirti then urged them to seek the Buddha-body." (Raoul Birnbaum, *The Healing Buddha*, p. 13.)

It should be clear that, although the Buddha taught that the human body is a skin-bag filled with excrement, His is not a pessimistic view of life, but a realistic one. The Buddha recognized the need to use the body as a means to enlightenment. Thus, one important injunction to monks and laymen is never to entertain the thought of suicide.

54. This is a key concept in Buddhism: the teaching is infinitely adaptable but its truth is always the same.

55. "Seven treasures," "eighty-four thousand characteristics" are among the numerous allegorical numbers found in Buddhist sutras and commentaries. The seven treasures are, literally, gold, silver, crystal, etc. but also stand for the seven powers (faith, perseverance, shame, avoidance of wrongdoing, mindfulness, concentration, wisdom).

56. Fa Yen (885-958), founder of one of the Five Houses (divisions) of Zen. See Glossary, "Five Houses."

"In the House of Fa-yen, the Avatamsaka world view occupied an even more prominent place than it did in other Zen schools. The master studied the *Avatamsaka Scriptures* intensely ... Fa-yen carried on the methods of the T'ang Zen masters. He loved paradoxes and aimed at inducing sudden enlightenment."

National Master Te Shao (891-971) was Fa-yen's most illustrious student. Zen Master Yung Ming was Te Shao's best known disciple.

"Yung Ming introduced a development that truly bore

fruit only later ... He may be considered the pioneer of the unification movement between Zen and the *nembutsu* tradition, a movement that later on was to gain the upper hand in Chinese Buddhism." (Heinrich Dumoulin, *Zen Buddhism*, p. 234-235.)

57. See the following partial translation of these verses:

"With both dhyana [Zen] and the Pure Land
One is like a tiger with horns;
In the present age a teacher of man,
In the future a Buddhist Patriarch.

With dhyana but without the Pure Land
Nine out of ten will take the wrong road;
Without dhyana and with only the Pure Land,
If ten thousand practice, ten thousand will go."
(Hsuan Hua, *Pure Land & Ch'an Dharma Talks*, p. 23-24.)

58. This commentary consists of a dialogue between two Zen Masters. Therefore, the reader should bear in mind the paradoxical method of reasoning in Zen, as described earlier in Note 40. See also the following passage:

"Beliefs are mistaken as long as they are supposed to be absolutely true, in contrast to other beliefs which are then considered false; they actually become absolutely true only when their relative nature is fully realized and there is no longer any question of true versus false.

For example, one of the American astronauts, standing on the moon and looking up at the earth in the sky, is said to have suddenly realized that he was standing in what had formerly been the sky for him and looking up at what was once the ground. To see that earth and moon are simultaneously ground and sky to one another is a Hua Yen [Avatamsaka] insight. Again, there is a popular story of the Zen master who separately told two quarreling disciples that each of them was right. When a third disciple protested that they couldn't both be right, the master said, 'You are right

too.' This also expresses the Hua Yen attitude. (Historically speaking, Hua Yen teachings have in fact had a great influence on the Zen tradition.)" (A.J. Prince, "The World of Hua Yen Buddhism." Reprinted in *Phật Học (CA, USA)*, no. 6, 1986, p. 135-136.)

This article by a professor at the University of Sydney (Australia) provides an excellent, in-depth view of Hua Yen Buddhism. It kindled the editor's interest in Hua Yen philosophy and started him on his translation pursuits.

59. This concept of faith is very important in all Buddhist schools, Zen, Pure Land and Tantric, etc. alike. See the following quote from D.T. Suzuki:

"A thoroughgoing enlightenment, however, is attained only through the most self-sacrificing application of the mind, supported by an inflexible faith in the finality of Zen ... The necessary requirements are faith and personal effort, without which Zen is a mere bubble." (D.T. Suzuki, *An Introduction to Zen Buddhism*, p. 115.)

See also the following quote from the *Avatamsaka Sutra:*

"Faith is the basis of the Path,
the mother of virtues,
Nourishing and growing all good ways,
Cutting away the net of doubt,
freeing from the torrent of passion,
Revealing the unsurpassed road to
ultimate peace."
(Thomas Cleary, tr. *The Flower Ornament Sutra*, Vol I, p. 331.)

On the issue of faith at the time of death in Pure Land teaching, see the following quote:

"There is even a place in the Western Paradise for the

worst sinners. The *Meditation Sutra* relates that even if a person has committed the five sins or ten sins, if this sinner earnestly recites Amitabha's name ten times on his deathbed, a lotus throne will appear and will bear him to the lowest stage in Paradise -- the lower birth of the lower degree. Instead of being condemned to eighty million kalpas in hell, the sinner will be born in the Western Paradise in a closed lotus flower; after a period of six kalpas the lotus throne will open and release him. This teaching of the nine possible levels of birth was an extremely effective way to reward good deeds on earth while still offering the promise of salvation to all, regardless of how much merit they had accumulated." (Joji Okazaki, *Pure Land Buddhist Painting*, p. 52.)

60. "Thus, when you are practicing Zen, all thoughts other than the method [kung an] should be considered as demons, even if it feels like you have entered a 'heavenly' state. Some people, as they are sitting, may suddenly enter a completely new world which is very beautiful and comfortable. Afterwards, they want to return to it in each meditation. They may be able to get into that state again, but nonetheless it is an attachment. There are also other states that are terrifying. Such visions, good and bad, are generally manifestations of our own mental realms." (Master Sheng-Yen, *Faith in Mind,* p. 66.)

61. Asvaghosha:

"Indian poet and Mahayana philosopher who lived in the first to second centuries and is considered one of the most important Buddhist authors." (*Shambhala Dictionary.*)

Author of the famous work *Treatise on the Awakening of the Faith.*

62. For *Meditation Sutra*, see Glossary "Three Pure Land Sutras."

63. "The national master Qingliang, who succeeded to the position of patriarch of the Huayan [Avatamsaka] school, and who was acclaimed as an incarnation of Manjushri, taught that

Amitabha is ... Vairocana. He also wrote a commentary on the Contemplation of Amitabha Sutra, and propagated Pure Land techniques widely." (Quoted by J.C. Cleary in *Pure Land, Pure Mind.*)

64. Nagarjuna. One of the most important philosophers of Buddhism (2nd-3rd centuries), founder of the Madhyamika ("Middle Way") School.

"Nagarjuna is revered in all of Mahayana as a great religious figure, in many places as a Bodhisattva. Not only Zen, but also the Tantric branch of Buddhism and the devotional communities of Amitabha Buddha, count Nagarjuna among their patriarchs." (Dumoulin, *Zen Buddhism*, p. 44.)

65. "Since the Pure Land [School] was organizationally weak, it was dependent on the Ch'an monastic orders. Many important Ch'an masters were at the same time Pure Land devotees." (Sung-peng Hsu, *A Buddhist Leader in Ming China*, p. 44 and 174, Note 94.)

In East and Southeast Asia, according to most observers, there is no real division into Zen and Pure Land temples, as the two forms of practice tend to co-exist in the same premises. In Japan, on the other hand, there are distinct Zen and Pure Land temples.

66. These three sections between brackets are summaries of the original text, which is at least four to five times longer.

Some fourteen Zen masters are cited here by name as practicing and propagating Pure Land teachings.

"During the Sung period, sometimes with the support of the masters and sometimes against their opposition, the nembutsu made greater and greater inroads into Zen monasteries. This process of mixing religious practices continued through the Yuan period and came to term during the Ming dynasty. The simultaneous practice of Zen and the

nembutsu became a matter of common practice. In trying to judge this whole development, we must not forget the inner affinities of the two practices. The psychological effects of the meditative repetition of the holy name are close to the effects of Zen meditation." (H. Dumoulin, *Zen Buddhism*, p. 286.)

67. See Glossary, "Five Houses of Zen."

68. Pai Chang (720-814).

"Pai Chang was the first to lay out a clearly formulated rule for Zen monks ... Drawing on the traditions of ... vinaya [monastic discipline], Pai Chang created a new rule adapted to Zen ... The *Pure Rule of Pai Chang* included the basic Buddhist commandments ... as well as additional injunctions against luxury ... Both the lifestyle that Pai Chang spelled out as well as the architectural form of his monastery became models for later Zen monasteries. The service he rendered the monastic community life of Zen earned him the epithet, 'the patriarch who created the forest.'" (H. Dumoulin, *Zen Buddhism*,, p. 170.)

69. Ma Tsu. See Glossary.

70. For an interesting aside on Zen and its special method of teaching, see the following:

"It's said that one day Brahma, lord of creation, offered the Buddha a flower and asked him to preach the Dharma. When the Buddha held up the flower, his audience was puzzled, except for Kashyapa, who smiled. This is how Zen began. And this is how it was transmitted: with a flower, with a rock wall, *with a shout*. (emphasis added.) (Red Pine, *The Zen Teaching of Bodhidharma*,, p. xvi.)

71. In Mahayana Buddhism, be it Pure Land, Zen, etc., Amitabha Buddha, at the noumenon level, is our Enlightened Self-Nature, all-illuminating and everlasting -- just as He is the Buddha of Infinite Light and Infinite Life. Hence, the expression "Self-Nature Amitabha Buddha, Mind-Only Pure Land" represents the teaching

that, if the Mind is pure, the environment, the land, is pure as well. This expression is popular in Zen.

72. Four kinds of Lands. A classification by the Pure Land and T'ien T'ai Schools of the various realms described in the sutras. They are:

i) the Land of Common Residence of Beings and Saints, where all beings, from the six lower worlds (hells, hungry ghosts ...) to the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas, live together (further divided into two, the Common Residence *Pure* Land and Common Residence *Impure* Land);

ii) The Land of Expediency, inhabited by Arhats and lesser Bodhisattvas;

iii) the Land of True Reward, inhabited by the highest Bodhisattvas;

iv) the Land of Eternally Tranquil Light, in which the Buddhas dwell.

These distinctions are introduced as a heuristc device. At the noumenon level, there is, of course, no difference among them.

73. Ten thousand, ten billion, i.e., an infinite number.

74. This is a key Mahayana concept: "Mind, Buddha, sentient beings -- the three are not different."

75. For a description and explanation of Indra's net, see Francis Cook, *Hua-Yen Buddhism*, p. 2.

76. "Ocean seal," "sudden and perfect," are technical terms used in the *Avatamsaka Sutra* and other Mahayana sutras. The meaning of the paragraph can be

summarized in the famous Avatamsaka teaching of "one in one, one in all, all in one, all in all," everything interpenetrating freely ad infinitum.

77. See the *Avatamsaka Sutra*, Chap. 20:

"If one wishes to understand/ All Buddhas of the three periods of time,/ One should contemplate the nature of the Dharma realm:/Everything is made from the mind alone." (tr. by Master Hsuan Hua.)

78. Very important concept.

79. "Some people say that the Pure Land is nothing but mind, that there is no Pure Land of Ultimate Bliss beyond the trillions of worlds of the cosmos. This talk of mind-only has its source in the words of the sutras, and is true, not false. But those who quote it in this sense are misunderstanding its meaning.

"Mind equals objects: there are no objects beyond mind. Objects equal mind: there is no mind beyond objects. Since objects are wholly mind, why must we cling to mind and dismiss objects? Those who dismiss objects when they talk of mind have not comprehended mind." (Master Zhuhong, in J.C. Cleary, trans., *Pure Land, Pure Mind.)*

80. Although the real aim of Buddha Recitation is one-pointedness of Mind, recitation with a scattered Mind also leads to accumulation of merits, albeit on a much smaller scale. This is because everything has its source in the Mind; thus, all recitation springs, by necessity, from some degree of purity of Mind. (See also Notes 82 and 103.)

81. The Ten Great Vows are the supremely important ("king") vows of a Bodhisattva. To follow them is tantamount to cultivating all the practices leading to supreme enlightenment. These vows are found in Chapter 40 (last chapter) of the *Avatamsaka Sutra.*

Since the Sutra has been translated several times over the centuries, this chapter is missing in some versions. For example, the English translation by Thomas Cleary is based on a version which lacks this chapter.

82. Donating flowers, etc. to Buddhist temples. These actions have merit in Buddhist teaching and can lead to rebirth in the Pure Land because they have their source in a pure Mind. Just as calm waters reflect the moon, a pure Mind naturally accrues merits. No god or supernatural powers need to be involved.

Ideally, such good actions should be carried out to perfection, as a "meritless deed," i.e., without any thought of giver, receiver or gift.

83. Holding the Name Buddha Recitation.

"In this method, the practitioner recites, aloud or silently, either 'Nam Mo Amitabha Buddha' or 'Amitabha Buddha.' The short form (Amitabha Buddha) has the advantage of easily focussing the cultivator's Mind, while the longer version facilitates development of a truly earnest, respectful Mind conducive to a response. This method, taught by the Buddha in the *Shorter Amitabha Sutra*, is most commonly in use at the present time ...

"Only the Holding the Name method embraces people of all capacities, leads to swift results and is easy enough for anyone to practice. Holding the Name, practiced earnestly and correctly, will bring a response; in this very life, we can immediately see the features of Amitabha Buddha and the adornments of the Western Pure Land and awaken to the Original Mind. Even if we cannot attain True Mark in this life, we will certainly attain it after rebirth. For this reason, the Thirteenth Pure Land Patriarch, Master Yin Kuang, wrote the following words of praise:

'Exclusively Holding the Name will bring attainment
of True Mark,

Without contemplation we will still see the Western Land.'

"The ancients have also commented: 'Among Dharma methods, Pure Land is the short cut for attaining the Way. Within Pure Land, Holding the Name is the short cut.' Nowadays, this method (Holding the Name) is the most popular form of Buddha Recitation." (Thích Thiên Tâm, *Buddhism of Wisdom and Faith*, p. 119.)

84. The youth Sudhana and the Bodhisattva Samantabhadra (along with the Bodhisattva Manjusri and the Buddha Vairocana) are the main protagonists of the *Avatamsaka Sutra* (See Glossary.) The Flower Store World (see Glossary) represents the Buddhist cosmos within which the Western Pure Land is found.

The question is why Samantabhadra would urge his disciple Sudhana to seek rebirth in a limited realm (Western Pure Land) rather than in the larger realm of the Flower Store World. This is, of course, a typical question at the phenomenal level. At the noumenon level, there is no difference between these realms, as they are all empty and Mind-created.

85. This is an important point. See Note 44.

86. This is a manifestation of expedient means (skill-in means or upaya).

"They [Bodhisattvas] play with illusory manifestations/In order to develop living beings,/Showing themselves to be old or sick,/And even manifesting their own deaths.

"They demonstrate the burning of the earth/In the consuming flames of the world's end,/In order to demonstrate impermanence/To living beings with the notion of permanence." (Robert Thurman, *The Holy Teaching of Vimalakirti, p. 69).*

87. Equal Enlightenment and Wonderful Enlightenment are the very last stages of cultivation before the attainment of Buddhahood.

88. "It is like lighting a fire on top of ice. As the fire intensifies, the ice will melt. When the ice melts, then the fire will go out. Those people of a lower grade of rebirth who rely on the power of reciting the Buddha's name ... even though they, do not understand the birthlessness of the dharma nature, will attain the realm of birthlessness and will see the flame of rebirth spontaneously disappear at that time." (The Patriarch T'ao Ch'o, as quoted in David W. Chappell, "Chinese Buddhist Interpretations of the Pure Land." In *Buddhist and Taoist Studies I,* p. 42.)

89. See *Buddhism of Wisdom and Faith,*, Section 27, for details.

90. The concept as expressed here can be likened to the modern idea of executive clemency, whereby a head of state or a state governor can commute the sentence of a death row inmate. On a lower level, even a judge can set aside the decision of a jury under certain circumstances.

91. These three men are singled out because in all schools of Buddhism and in all rules of discipline, whether for monks or laymen, the prohibition against killing sentient beings is the cardinal precept.

92. This is, of course, a precursor to the creative sentencing of modern jurisprudence: a guilty person can be given a suspended sentence or made to perform a certain number of hours of community service. It is also in line with the concept that a reformed offender is no longer a threat to society and therefore does not require harsh punishment.

93. "Knowledge of previous lives," "faculty of reading

other people's minds," "supernatural vision" are supernormal powers of the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas. They possess these powers to the highest degree because they are free from all grasping and attachments, following the adage "no doer, no receiver, no gift ..."

94. The Dharma robe and the begging bowl are the traditional symbols of a Buddhist monk or nun. Buddhist followers (and by extension, the King of the Hells) accord them the utmost respect.

95. "As the Buddha told king Bimbisara, when a man accumulates good acts, at his death he will have no disturbing thoughts. This is like a tree which leans to the west and will necessarily fall in that direction in which it has been bent ... Also one should have several like-minded companions joined together in an agreement that when the end of one's life approaches, one will spell another every morning in calling upon the name of the Buddha Amitabha, desiring birth in Sukhavati ... " (Leo Pruden, tr. "A short Essay on the Pure Land by Dharma Master T'an Lun." *The Eastern Buddhist,* May 1975, p. 95.)

96. This list of ten great benefits is rather popular. There are several alternative translations into English.

97. See next Question.

98. See the following passage:

"You must take reciting the buddha-name as the correct basis, and making merit as an auxiliary factor. Cultivating both merit and wisdom, you will achieve correct enlightenment. Thus, causes encompass the sea of results, and results extend back through the causal source." (cited in J.C. Cleary, *Pure Land, Pure Mind.)*

99. "Perfect antidote for the monkey Mind ... Does away with the monkey Mind. How hard this is to do." (Communication from kalyanamitra Barbara Levine.)

100. "Pure Land literature offers many stories presented as real life biographical accounts which corroborate the description of the Pure Land paradise drawn from the scriptures ... The stories often relate people's early experience of Buddhism, and note the various practices they took up and the scriptures they studied. In due time, their faith in Pure Land is awakened, perhaps by meeting an inspirational teacher, perhaps through a dream or vision, perhaps from hearing the Pure Land scriptures ... The climax of a Pure Land biography comes in the subject's death scene, when buddha-name recitation is rewarded and the Pure Land teachings are confirmed. The believer dies peacefully, even joyously, with mind and body composed, in full confidence of rebirth in paradise, reciting the buddha's name." (J.C. Cleary, *Pure Land, Pure Mind.*)

101. This image of Buddhas emerging from the mouths of Great Masters appears frequently in Japanese Pure Land paintings, particularly in the depiction of the Patriarch Shan Tao. (cf. Joji Okazaki, *Pure Land Buddhist Painting*, p. 173.)

102. Non-dual.

"This is synonymous with reality, voidness, etc. But it must be remembered that nonduality does not necessarily mean unity, that unity is only one of the pair unity-duality; hence nonduality implies nonunity as well." (Robert Thurman, *The Holy Teaching of Vimalakirti*, p. 163.) See also Glossary under "Non-Dual."

103. "According to the recorded sayings of Ch'an Mirror, 'the Self-Mind is all-pervading and if you see a Buddha, this means that you can see your own Buddha.' That which is Fundamentally Unborn is existent but its existence does not alter the fact that it is Fundamentally Unborn, and so Ch'an may be said to be the Ch'an of the Pure Land and the Pure Land may also be said to the Pure Land of Ch'an. From this point of view, Dhyana [Zen] and Name-Reciting are in common with each other." (Hsu Heng Chi/P.H. Wei, *What's*

Buddhism? Theory and Practice, p. 59.) The expression "Ch'an of the Pure Land, Pure Land of Ch'an" (or Zen/Pure Land, Pure Land/Zen) indicates that the various Buddhist approaches, while seemingly different, lead ultimately to the same goal: purification of the Mind. As the saying goes, "all roads lead to Rome."

104. According to the *Mahasamghata Sutra:*

"To recite the Holy Name of Amita Buddha may be said to be tantamount to cultivating the profound and supreme Ch'an." (Quoted in Hsu Heng Chi, *What's Buddhism?*, p. 22.)

See also Dumoulin on the Zen/Pure Land relationship:

"In Zen monasteries, the invocation of Amitabha was practiced in combination with sitting in meditation. Moreover, during the Ming period we see a complete fusing of all Chinese Buddhist schools and sects." (*Zen Buddhism: A History*, p. 286.)

Editors' Glossary

Amitabha (Amida, Amita, Amitayus). Amitabha is the most commonly used name for the Lord of Infinite Light and Infinite Life. A transhistorical Buddha venerated by all Mahayana schools (T'ien T'ai, Esoteric, Zen ...) and, particularly, Pure Land. Presides over the Western Pure Land (Land of Ultimate Bliss), where anyone can be reborn with ten utterly sincere recitations of His name at the time of death.

Amitabha Buddha at the highest or noumenon level represents the Mind of the Buddhas and sentient beings, all-encompassing and all-inclusive. This deeper understanding provides the rationale for the harmonization of Zen and Pure Land, two popular schools of Mahayana Buddhism.

Arhat. Buddhist saint, who has attained liberation from the cycle of birth and death, generally through living a monastic life in accordance with the Buddha's teaching. Arhatship is the goal of Theravadin practice, as contrasted with Bodhisattvahood in Mahayana practice. (*Dictionary of Buddhism*, Bangkok, 1976.)

Avatamsaka Sutra. The basic text of the Avatamsaka School. It is one of the longest sutras in the Buddhist Canon and records the highest teaching of Buddha Sakyamuni, immediately after enlightenment. It is traditionally believed that the Sutra was taught to the Bodhisattvas and other high spiritual beings while the Buddha was in samadhi. The Sutra has been described as the epitome of Buddhist thought, Buddhist sentiment and Buddhist experience and is quoted by all schools of Mahayana Buddhism, in particular, Pure Land and Zen.

Bardo stage. The intermediate stage between death and rebirth.

Bodhi Mind. The spirit of enlightenment, or the aspiration to achieve it; the Mind set on enlightenment. It involves two parallel aspects: i) the determination to achieve Buddhahood and ii) the aspiration to rescue all sentient beings.

Bodies of the Buddha. See "Three Bodies of the Buddha."

Buddha Recitation. General term for a number of practices, such as oral recitation of Amitabha Buddha's name and visualization or contemplation of His auspicious marks and of the Pure Land. When used in a broad sense, it also includes such sundry practices as cultivating the Ten Great Vows, building temples and reciting sutras. (Master T'ien Ju, Questions 7 and 23.)

"Reciting the buddha-name proceeds from the mind. The mind remembers Buddha and does not forget. That's why it is called buddha remembrance, or reciting the buddha-name mindfully." (Cited in J.C. Cleary, *Pure Land, Pure Mind.*)

Conditioned (compounded). Refers to all the various phenomena in the world -- made up of separate, discrete elements, with no intrinsic nature of their own.

Dharma. a) Duty, law, doctrine. b) Things, events, phenomena, everything. c) The teachings of the Buddha (generally capitalized in English).

Dharma Body. See "Three Bodies of the Buddha."

Dharma-Ending Age, Degenerate Age. The present era, when "only the appearance of the Dharma [teachings of the Buddha] remains, few care to practice it, and realization is extremely difficult to attain" (G.C.C. Chang). The modern reader, unfamiliar with the concept of the Dharma-Ending Age may wish to recall the famous story of Hui K'o, the second Chinese Patriarch of Zen, who, according to tradition, knelt in the snow behind Bodhidharma for many months before being accepted as a disciple. Contrast this with the contemporary situation when even the holiest of all Buddhist holidays, Vesak (Birthday of Sakyamuni Buddha), must be held on the week-end to ensure adequate attendance.

Dharma Nature (Buddha Nature). The intrinsic nature of all things. Used interchangeably with "emptiness," "reality."

Dharma Realm (Cosmos, dharmadhatu, realm of reality, realm of truth). In Buddhist texts it has several meanings: i) the nature or essence of all things; ii) infinity; iii) the infinite universe per se; (G.C.C. Chang) iv) the Mind.

Dharmakara. The Bodhisattva who later became Amitabha Buddha, as related in the *Longer Amitabha Sutra*. The Bodhisattva Dharmakara is famous for forty-eight vows, particularly the eighteenth, which promises rebirth in the Pure Land to whoever recites his name with utmost sincerity at the time of death.

Difficult Path of Practice (Path of the Sages, Self-Power Path). Refers to all conventional Buddhist ways of practice and cultivation (Zen,

Theravada, the Vinaya School ...), which emphasize self-power and self-reliance, as such methods traditionally require eons to achieve Supreme Enlightenment. This is contrasted to the Easy Path of Practice, that is. Buddha Recitation (Pure Land School).

Easy Path of Practice (Other-Power). Reliance on the power of the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas, in particular Buddha Amitabha ("other-power"), in addition to one's own power ("self-power"). Refers specifically to Buddha Recitation. Usually contrasted with primary reliance on self-power (Difficult Path of Practice), taught in other Buddhist schools.

Primary reliance on other-power distinguishes the Pure Land School from other schools of Buddhism, which emphasize self-power. The distinction is, however, an expedient, a matter of emphasis, as all schools of Buddhism rely on both self-power and other-power. Ultimately, of course, self-power is other-power, and vice-versa.

Eight Adversities. "The eight conditions which prevent one from seeing the Buddha or hearing the Dharma: 1. rebirth in hell; 2. rebirth as a hungry ghost; 3. rebirth as an animal; 4. rebirth in Uttarakuru (the continent where life is easy, so that one who lives there is not motivated to seek the Dharma); 5. rebirth in the long-life heavens (where one is also not motivated to seek the Dharma); 6. rebirth with impaired faculties; 7. rebirth as a worldly philosopher clever at sophistry; and 8. rebirth in a world where there is no Buddha" (G.C.C. Chang). Thus, even rebirth under "favorable" circumstances (fourth and seventh conditions, for example) may constitute adversity with respect to the Buddha Dharma.

Emptiness (Void, Sunyata). Connotes "first, Void

in the sense of antithesis of being; second, the state of being 'devoid' of specific character; third, Void in the highest sense, or Transcendental Void, i.e., all oppositions synthesized ...; and fourth, the Absolute Void or the Unconditioned" (Vergilius Ferm, ed. *An Encyclopedia of Religion*).

Contrasted with "hollow emptiness," or "stubborn emptiness," which is one-sided and leads to nihilism ... Thus, the expression, "True Emptiness, Wonderful Existence."

Evil Paths. Hells, hungry ghosts, animality.

Eternalism. "Believing that there is true existence of real beings in objects, or that there is some entity that exists forever" (G.C.C. Chang). One of the "two extreme views," the other being nihilism.

Expedient means (Skillful means, Skill-in-means). Refers to strategies, methods, devices, targetted to the capacities, circumstances, likes and dislikes of each sentient being, so as to rescue him and lead him to enlightenment. "Thus, all particular formulations of the Teaching are just provisional expedients to communicate the Truth (Dharma) in specific contexts" (J.C. Cleary). "The Buddha's words were medicines for a given sickness at a given time," always infinitely adaptable to the conditions of the audience.

Five Grave Offenses (Five Deadly Sins). Offenses which cause rebirth in the Uninterrupted Hell. They are: killing one's father, one's mother, or an Arhat, causing dissension within the Sangha, causing the Tathagata to bleed.

Five Houses (Schools) of Zen. The five branches (sometimes divided into seven) of the southern Chinese schools of Ch'an (Zen), the best known of which are the Lin-Chi (Rinzai) and Tsao-Tung (Soto). All the southern schools belong to the lineage of the Sixth Patriarch, Hui-Neng (638-713).

Five Turbidities (Corruptions, Defilements, Depravities, Filths, Impurities). "The five are: 1. the filth of kalpa, when the historical cycle is in a period of degeneration; 2. the filth of views, when all sorts of wrong views prevail; 3. the filth of passions, when desire, hatred and other defilements are predominant; 4. the filth of human condition, when people are more often miserable than happy; and 5. the filth of life span, when the human life span diminishes" (G.C.C. Chang). These conditions, viewed from a Buddhist angle, however, can constitute aids to enlightenment, as they may spur practitioners to more earnest cultivation.

Flower Store World. The entire cosmos, as described in the *Avatamsaka Sutra*. It is the land of Vairocana Buddha, the transcendental aspect of Buddha Sakyamuni and of all Buddhas. The Saha World, the Western Pure Land and, for that matter, all lands, are realms within the Flower Store World.

Four Great Debts. Debts to one's parents, the Three Treasures (Buddha, Dharma, Sangha), the rulers of the country and all sentient beings ("all men were my fathers, all women my mothers" in past lives).

Good Spiritual Advisor. Anyone (Buddha, Bodhisattva, sentient being ...) who can help the practitioner progress along the path to enlightenment. This notwithstanding, *wisdom* should be the primary

factor in the selection of such an advisor: the advisor must have wisdom, and both advisor and practitioner must exercise wisdom in selecting one another.

Insight into Non-arising of the Dharmas. See "Tolerance of Non-Birth."

Lankavatara Sutra. The only sutra recommended by Bodhidharma, the First Zen Patriarch in China. It is a key Zen text, along with the *Diamond Sutra* (recommended by the Sixth Patriarch), the *Surangama Sutra*, the *Vimalakirti Sutra*, the *Avatamsaka Sutra* ...

Lotus Grade. Refers allegorically to nine possible degrees of rebirth in the Pure Land. The more merits the practitioner accumulates, the higher the grade.

Lotus Sutra. A major Buddhist text and one of the most widely read sutras in the present day.

"One of the earliest and most richly descriptive of the Mahayana sutras of Indian origin. It became important for the shaping of the Buddhist tradition in East Asia, in particular because of its teaching of the One Vehicle under which is subsumed the usual Hinayana [Theravada] and Mahayana divisions. It is the main text of the Tendai [T'ien T'ai] school." (Joji Okazaki).

This School has a historically close relationship with the Pure Land School, so much so that Elder Master T'ai Hsu taught that the *Lotus Sutra* is the *Longer Amitabha Sutra* in expanded form, while the *Longer Amitabha Sutra* is a summary of the *Lotus Sutra*.

Ma Tsu (709-788). Third generation Zen Master after the Sixth Patriarch Hui Neng. He was the

originator of the kung-an exercise.

"He was the first to make use of shouting as a means of fostering enlightenment, a means later made famous by Lin-chi (Jpn. Rinzai)." (H. Dumoulin, *Zen Buddhism*, p. 163.)

Maitreya. The future Buddha of this Saha World. One of the few transhistorical Buddhas (i.e., Buddha with no basis in human history) recognized by the Theravada School.

Manjusri. Bodhisattva who represents the Ultimate Wisdom of the Buddhas. (The Elder Sariputra exemplifies the wisdom of the Arhats.) See also "Sariputra."

Marks. See "Noumenon/Phenomena."

Meditation Sutra. See "Three Pure Land Sutras" and "Vaidehi."

Middle Way (Madhyamika). The way between and above all extremes, such as hedonism or ascetism, existence or emptiness, eternalism or nihilism, samsara or nirvana, etc. A basic tenet of Mahayana Buddhism.

Mind. Key concept in all Buddhist teaching. To achieve true and complete mastery of the Mind is to become a Buddha.

"Frequent term in Zen, used in two senses: (1) the mind-ground, the One Mind ... the buddha-mind, the mind of thusness ... (2) false mind, the ordinary mind dominated by conditioning, desire, aversion, ignorance, and false sense of self, the mind of delusion; hence states of mind, attitudes, the mental moments of experience." (J.C. Cleary, *A Buddha from*

Korea, p. 174.)

Nature and Marks. See "Noumenon/Phenomena."

Nihilism. "Considering that things do not exist in any sense, even the delusory manifestations of the world; also, the tenet that nothing continues after death, i.e. the denial of the doctrine of reincarnation" (G.C.C. Chang). One of the "two extreme views," the other being eternalism.

Non-Birth (No-Birth). "A term used to describe the nature of Nirvana. In Mahayana Buddhism generally, No-Birth signifies the 'extinction' of the discursive thinking by which we conceive of things as arising and perishing, forming attachments to them" (Ryukoku University). See also "Tolerance of Non- Birth."

Non-Dual. Key Buddhist truth. Can be understood as not two and not one -- transcending two and one. Equivalent to reality, emptiness ...

Noumenon/Phenomena. Noumenon: principle, essence of things, always one and indivisible. Phenomena: All things and events. Used in plural form to contrast with noumenon.

"'Noumenon' (principle) is reason, the realm of enlightenment, and belongs to the sphere of 'nature.' 'Phenomena' are expedients, practices, deeds, 'form,' and fall under the heading of 'marks.' However, in the end, phenomena are noumenon, nature is mark, and both belong to the same truth-like Nature, all-illuminating, all-pervading. In cultivation, noumenon and phenomena are the two sides of a coin, interacting with one another and helping one another. With noumenon, we have a basis, a direction, a goal to develop into action. With phenomena, we are able to

actualize what we think, demonstrate our understanding, arrive at an objective goal and, ultimately, achieve results.

"Noumenon is like the eyes that watch the road. Phenomena are like the feet that set out to walk. Without eyes, or with glassy, dim eyes, it is easy to get lost. Without feet, however sharp our eyes, there is no way to reach our destination. To 'have' noumenon but not phenomena is like having a map and knowing the way, but refusing to proceed. To 'have' phenomena but not noumenon is like setting out on a journey with neither a guide nor a clear itinerary. To have both noumenon and phenomena is not only to know the way perfectly but also to proceed to walk. We cannot fail to reach the City of Lights.

"Noumenon and phenomena, principle and marks are thus interdependent. If one factor is missing, success is illusory. However, even though the practitioner may lack the enlightenment factor, if he follows the itinerary taught by the sages and cultivates, he, too, can reach the goal and succeed. Sutras, commentaries, biographies, as well as the writings of ancient masters and advice from today's good spiritual advisors -- these constitute the itinerary. If we follow these teachings and put them into practice, we will surely achieve results. Therefore, to have practice but lack 'theory' is not necessarily a cause for alarm. Of most concern are those who understand 'theory' but fail to put it into practice. Verbalizing incessantly, they discourse without end about the mysterious and the wonderful, but they do not progress one step during their entire lives.

"In truth, those who lack 'practice' are not really in possession of 'theory.' Why is this so? As an analogy, if a person knows his house is on fire, yet remains inside without trying to escape, is he any different from someone who is not aware of the fire? Therefore, the Buddha Dharma can help those who are deluded and do not understand a single word, but cannot save those who possess mundane knowledge and eloquence but lack practice." (Thích Thiền Tâm, *Buddhism of Wisdom and Faith,* Section 46.)

Ocean Seal Samadhi. A state of concentration of the highest level, described, *inter alia*, in the *Avatamsaka Sutra*. ... The Mind is likened to the ocean, which, when calm and without a single wave, can reflect everything throughout the cosmos, past, present and future.

Ocean-Wide Assembly. Term used in the *Avatamsaka Sutra* to denote a transcendental gathering of Buddhas, Bodhisattvas, Arhats and other sentient beings, as immense as the ocean.

One-Life Bodhisattva. A Bodhisattva who is one lifetime away from Buddhahood.

One-Pointedness of Mind. Singlemindedness or singleminded concentration.

Other-Power See "Easy Path of Practice."

Paramitas. "This can be translated as 'the perfection of' ..., or 'reaching the other shore by means of' .... Paramita is the central practice of a Bodhisattva" (Garma C.C. Chang). The paramitas are usually six in number (charity, discipline, forbearance, energy, concentration, wisdom) or expanded to ten (adding expedients, vows, power and knowledge). The Mahayana tradition emphasizes the paramita of expedients, or skill-in-means.

Path of Sages. See "Difficult Path of Practice."

Perfect Teaching (Round Teaching). Supreme teaching of the Buddha, as expressed in the *Avatamsaka* and *Lotus Sutras*.

Pure Land. Generic term for the realms of the Buddhas. In this text it denotes the Land of Ultimate Bliss or Western Land of Amitabha Buddha. It is "a paradise realm of the spirit world" (Raoul Birnbaum), an *ideal place of cultivation*, beyond the Triple Realm and samsara, where those who are reborn are no longer subject to retrogession. This is the key distinction between the Western Pure Land and such realms as the Tusita Heaven. There are two conceptions of the Pure Land: as different and apart from the Saha World *and* as one with and the same as the Saha World. When the Mind is pure and undefiled, any land or environment becomes a pure land (*Vimalakirti, Lotus, Avatamsaka Sutras* ...). Everything, the Pure Land included, is Mind-Only, a product of the Mind. See also "Triple Realm."

Pure Land Sutras See "Three Pure Land Sutras."

Reward Body See "Three Bodies of the Buddha."

Saha World. World of Endurance. Refers to this world of ours, filled with suffering and affliction, yet gladly enjoyed and endured by its inhabitants.

Samadhi. Meditative absorption. "Usually denotes the particular final stage of pure concentration." There are many degrees and types of samadhi (Buddha Remembrance, Ocean Seal ...)

Samantabhadra. Bodhisattva who personifies the transcendental practices and vows of the Buddhas. Usually depicted seated on an elephant with six tusks (six paramitas). Best known for his "Ten Great Vows."

Sariputra. Major disciple of Sakyamuni Buddha, foremost in wisdom among Arhats. See also "Manjusri."

Self-Power See "Difficult Path of Practice."

Seven Treasures. Gold, silver, lapis lazuli, crystal, agate, red pearl and carnelian. They represent the seven powers of faith, perseverance, "shame," avoidance of wrongdoing, mindfulness, concentration and wisdom.

Six Directions. North, South, East, West, above and below, i.e., all directions. In the *Avatamsaka Sutra*, they are expanded to include points of the compass in-between and are referred to as the Ten Directions.

Skillful Means. See "Expedient Means."

Subhuti. One of Buddha Sakyamuni's major disciples. Foremost among Arhats in understanding doctrine of the Void (Emptiness). However, the Buddha predicted in the *Lotus Sutra*, Ch. 6 that he would achieve Buddhahood with the title Name-and-Form Buddha, thus demonstrating that Emptiness is Form and Form is Emptiness -- the two are not different (*Heart Sutra*).

Sudhana. The main protagonist in the last and longest chapter of the *Avatamsaka Sutra*. Seeking enlightenment, he visited and studied with fifty-three spiritual advisors and became the equal of the Buddha in one lifetime. When he was born, myriad treasures suddenly appeared in his father's home. Thus the name "Sudhana" or "Good Wealth."

Ten Evil Deeds (Ten Evil Acts, Ten Sins). Opposite of the Ten Virtues. See also "Ten Virtues."

Ten Great Vows. The vows of the Bodhisattva Samantabhadra in the *Avatamsaka Sutra*. These vows represent the quintessence of this Sutra and are the cornerstone of all Mahayana practice. Studying the Vows and putting them into practice is, for most Mahayana cultivators, tantamount to studying the *Avatamsaka Sutra* and practicing its teachings.

Ten Mysterious Gates (Ten Esoteric Doors, Ten Mysteries, Ten Propositions). Ten aspects of the interrelationship of all phenomena, as seen from the enlightened point of view. To explain such relationship and harmony,

"The [Avatamsaka] School advances the Ten Profound Propositions: 1) All things are co-existent, corresponding to one another. 2) The intension and extension of one thing involve those of others without any obstacle. 3) The One and the Many are mutually inclusive. 4) All things are identical with one another. 5) The hidden and the manifested mutually perfect each other. 6) All minute and abstruse things mutually penetrate one another. 7) All things reflect one another. 8) Truth is manifested in facts and facts are the source of Enlightenment. 9) The past, present and future are inter-penetrating. 10) All things are manifestations and transformations of the Mind." (Ferm, Op. cit.).

Ten Recitations. "Ten recitations refers to the Ten Recitation method ... based on the lowest grade of rebirth described in the *Meditation Sutra*. It is reserved specifically for those who are busy with mundane activities, so that they, too, can practice Buddha Recitation and achieve rebirth. The method consists of uttering the Buddha's name up to ten times, each time one inhales or exhales. The real intent behind this practice is to use the breath to concentrate the Mind. Depending on the cultivator's breath span, he can recite

more than ten utterances, or only seven or eight. After ten such inhalations and exhalations (or some sixty to over one hundred utterances) the cultivator can proceed to recite the Transference of Merits Gatha:

'I vow to be reborn in the Western Pure Land,
The nine lotus grades are my parents.
As the lotus flowers bloom, I will see the Buddha
and reach No-Birth,
Liberating all sentient beings ... '

After reciting the vows, the practitioner bows to the Buddha three times before retiring." (Thích Thiền Tâm, *Buddhism of Wisdom and Faith*, Section 58.) See also Master T'ien Ju, Question 23.

Ten Stages. The ten "stages" of a Bodhisattva are the forty-first to fiftieth levels (out of fifty-two levels) of Bodhisattva enlightenment. For details, see *Avatamsaka Sutra*, Ch. 26.

Ten Virtues (Ten Precepts). Virtues of the body, mouth and Mind, leading to rebirth in the realms of the gods. Cultivating the Ten Virtues leads the practitioner to rebirth in, for example, the Tusita Heaven, though not yet in the Western Pure Land. The Ten Virtues include an expanded version of the Five Precepts of body and mouth (not to kill, steal, engage in illicit sex, take intoxicants, or lie) with the addition of the virtues of the Mind (elimination of greed, anger and delusion). See also "Ten Evil Deeds."

Three Bodies of the Buddha (Trikaya). These are:

1) Dharma Body (Dharmakaya, Body of Reality) "which is formless, unchanging, transcendental and

inconceivable. Synonymous with suchness or emptiness."

2) Reward Body (Sambhogakaya, Body of Enjoyment, Bliss Body, Celestial Body of the Buddha). "Personification of eternal perfection in its ultimate sense. It 'resides' in the Pure Land and never manifests itself in the mundane world, but only in the celestial spheres, accompanied by enlightened Bodhisattvas."

3) Transformation Body (Nirmanakaya, Manifested Body, Incarnate Body). "In order to benefit certain sentient beings, a Buddha incarnates himself into an appropriate physical body, such as that of Sakyamuni Buddha." ... (G.C.C. Chang)

Three Pure Land Sutras. Pure Land Buddhism is based on three basic texts:

a) *Amitabha Sutra* (or *Shorter Amitabha Sutra*, or *Smaller Sukhavati-Vyuha*, or the *Sutra of Amida*);

b) *Longer Amitabha Sutra* (or *Larger Sukhavati-Vyuha*, or the *Teaching of Infinite Life*);

c) *Meditation Sutra* (or the *Meditation on the Buddha of Infinite Life*, or the *Amitayur Dyana Sutra*).

Sometimes the last chapter of the *Avatamsaka Sutra* ("The Vows and Practices of the Bodhisattva Samantabhadra") is considered the fourth basic sutra of the Pure Land tradition.

Tolerance of Non-Birth. "Tolerance" (insight) that comes from the knowledge that all phenomena are unborn. Sometimes translated as "insight into the

non-origination of all existence/non-origination of the dharmas."

"A Mahayana Buddhist term for the insight into emptiness, the non-origination or birthlessness of things or beings realized by Bodhisattvas who have attained the eighth Stage (See Ten Stages) of the path to Buddhahood. When a Bodhisattva realizes this insight he has attained the stage of non- retrogression" (Ryukoku University).

Transference of Merit. The reader unaccustomed to the idea of merit transference could reflect on the following passage:

"Some of us may ask whether the effect of [evil] karma can be ... [changed] by repeating the name of Kuan-Yin. This question is tied up with that of rebirth in Sukhavati [the Pure Land] and it may be answered by saying that invocation of Kuan-Yin's name forms another cause which will right away offset the previous karma. We know, for example, that if there is a dark, heavy cloud above, the chances are that it will rain. But we also know that if a strong wind should blow, the cloud will be carried away somewhere else and we will not feel the rain. Similarly, the addition of one big factor can alter the whole course of karma ...

"It is only by accepting the idea of life as one whole that both Theravadins and Mahayanists can advocate the practice of transference of merit to others. With the case of Kuan-Yin then, by calling on Her name we identify ourselves with Her and as a result of this identification Her merits flow over to us. These merits which are now ours then counterbalance our bad karma and save us from calamity. The law of cause and effect still stands good. All that has happened is that a powerful and immensely good karma has foreshadowed the weaker one ...

"If we want to go deeper, we may say that this identification with a Bodhisattva also means that a Bodhisattva identifies Himself with us. When this occurs, there is not only the mere transference of merit, but the non-discriminate, infinite, unqualifiable Compassion of all the

Bodhisattvas coming into us, lifting us, as it were, right up into Nirvana." (Lecture on Kuan-Yin by Tech Eng Soon - Penang Buddhist Association, c. 1960. Pamphlet.)

Transformation Body. See "Three Bodies of the Buddha."

Triple Realm (Three Realms, Three Worlds). The realms of desire (our world), form (realms of the lesser deities) and formlessness (realms of the higher deities). The Western Pure Land is outside the Triple Realm, beyond samsara and retrogression. See also "Pure Land."

True Thusness (True Suchness). Equivalent to Buddha Nature, Dharma Body, etc.

Two Truths. 1) *Relative* or conventional, everyday truth of the mundane world subject to delusion and dichotomies and 2) the *Ultimate* Truth as taught by the Buddha.

Pure Land thinkers such as the Patriarch Tao Ch'o accepted "the legitimacy of Conventional Truth as an expression of Ultimate Truth and as a vehicle to reach Ultimate Truth. Even though all form is nonform, it is acceptable and necessary to use form within the limits of causality, because its use is an expedient means of saving others out of one's compassion for them and because, even for the unenlightened, the use of form can lead to the revelation of form as nonform" (David Chappell). Thus to reach Buddhahood, which is formless, the cultivator can practice the Pure Land method based on form.

"According to Buddhism, there are two kinds of Truth, the Absolute and the Relative. The Absolute Truth (of the Void) manifests 'illumination but is always still,' and this is

absolutely inexplicable. On the other hand, the Relative Truth (of the Unreal) manifests 'stillness but is always illuminating,' which means that it is immanent in everything" (Hsu Heng Chi/P.H. Wei). See also "Ultimate Meaning."

Ultimate Meaning (Definitive Meaning, Foremost Meaning). "This refers to those teachings of the Buddha that are in terms of ultimate reality ... relates to voidness." (Robert Thurman). See also "Two Truths."

Unconditioned. See "Conditioned."

Vaidehi. The Queen of King Bimbisara of Magadha. It was in response to her entreaties that Buddha Sakyamuni preached the *Meditation Sutra*, which teaches a series of sixteen visualizations (of Amitabha Buddha, the Pure Land ...) leading to rebirth in the Land of Ultimate Bliss.

Vairocana. The main Buddha in the *Avatamsaka Sutra*. Represents the Dharma Body of Buddha Sakyamuni and all Buddhas. His Pure Land is the Flower Store World.

Vimalakirti Sutra. A key Mahayana sutra particularly popular with Zen and to a lesser extent Pure Land followers. The main protagonist is a layman named Vimalakirti who is the equal of many Bodhisattvas in wisdom, eloquence, etc. He explained the teaching of Emptiness in terms of non-duality ... "The true nature of things is beyond the limiting concepts imposed by words." Thus, when asked by Manjusri to define the non-dual truth, Vimalakirti simply remained silent.

Complete, perfect enlightenment is based on the mind -- if the mind is pure and clear, one can fulfill all roots of goodness and will surely attain freedom in enlightenment.

Avatamsaka Sutra, Chap. 38
Thomas Cleary, tr.

Bibliography

Andrews, Allen A., "Nembutsu in Chinese Pure Land Tradition." In *The Eastern Buddhist,* Vol. 3, No. 2, October 1970, p. 20ff.

Birnbaum, Raoul, *The Healing Buddha.* Boston, Ma: Shambhala, 1989.

Chang, Garma C.C. general editor, *A Treasury of Mahayana Sutras.* University Park, Pa and London: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1983.

Cheng Chien, Bhikshu, tr., *Manifestation of the Tathagata: A Chapter from the Avatamsaka Sutra.* Taipei: Mahayana Vihara Press, 1991.

Chihmann (P.C. Lee), tr., *The Two Buddhist Books in Mahayana.* Taipei: Corporate Body of the Buddha Educational Foundation [no date]. Originally published in early 1930's.

Cleary, J.C. *Pure Land, Pure Mind.* (Unpublished manuscript.)

Cleary, Thomas, tr., *The Flower Ornament Scripture: A Translation of the Avatamsaka Sutra.* (Three vols.) Boston Ma and London: Shambhala, 1984-1987.

Cook, Francis, *Hua-Yen Buddhism: The Jewel Net of Indra.* University Park, Pa and London: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1977.

Cowell, E.B, et al., ed., *Buddhist Mahayana Texts.* New

York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1969. (Reprint of *The Sacred Books of the East*, Vol. XLIX.)

Dumoulin, Heinrich, *Zen Buddhism: A History. Vol. I, India and China*. Tr. by James W. Heisig and Paul Knitter. New York and London: Macmillan, 1988.

Fujita, Kotatsu, *The Textual Origin of the Kuan Wu-liang-shou Ching*, tr. by Kenneth K. Tanaka.

Goddard, Dwight ed., *A Buddhist Bible*. Boston, Ma: Beacon Press, 1970.

Hsu, Heng Chi, *What's Buddhism? Theory and Practice*. Tr. by P.H. Wei. Hong Kong: Hong Kong Buddhist Books Distributor, 1989.

Hsu, Sung-peng, *A Buddhist Leader in Ming China*. University Park, Pa and London: State University of Pennsylvania Press, 1979.

Hsuan Hua, *A General Explanation of the Buddha Speaks of Amitabha Sutra*. San Francisco, Ca: Buddhist Text Translation Society, 1974.

Hsuan Hua, *Pure Land & Ch'an Dharma Talks*. San Francisco, Ca: Sino-American Buddhist Association, 1974.

Hsuan Hua, tr. *Flower Adornment Sutra*. Talmadge, Ca: Buddhist Text Translation Society. 1982- [Issued in parts.]

Karma Lekshe Tsomo ed., *Sakyadhita: Daughters of the Buddha*. (Report of the International Conference on Buddhist Nuns, held Feb. 1987 in Bodh Gaya, India.) Ithaca, NY: Snow Lion Publications, 1988.

Luk, Charles, tr., *The Vimalakirti Nirdesa Sutra*. Boston, Ma: Shambhala, 1972.

Okazaki, Joji, *Pure Land Buddhist Painting*. Tr. by Elizabeth ten Grotenhuis. Tokyo: Kodansha, 1977.

Prince, A.J., "The World of Hua Yen Buddhism." Reprinted in *Phật Học (Ca, USA)*, No. 6, 1986, p. 135-136.

Pruden, Leo, tr. "Ching-t'u Shih-i-Lun." (Ten Doubts.) In *The Eastern Buddhist*, Vol. 6, No. 1, May 1973, p. 126ff.

Pruden, Leo, tr. "A Short Essay on the Pure Land by Dharma Master T'an Luan." In *The Eastern Buddhist*, May 1975, p. 95ff.

Red Pine, tr., *The Zen Teaching of Bodhidharma*. Berkeley Ca: North Point Press, 1989.

Sangharakshita, *The Eternal Legacy: An Introduction to the Canonical Literature of Buddhism*. London: Tharpa Publications, 1985.

Saso, Michael and David W. Chappell, ed., *Buddhist and Taoist Studies I*. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1987.

Seki, Hozen, *Buddha Tells of the Infinite: the "Amida Kyo."* New York: American Buddhist Academy, 1973.

The Shambhala Dictionary of Buddhism and Zen. Boston, Ma: Shambhala, 1991.

Shao, Simpei, tr., *Discourse on Samantabhadra's Beneficence Aspirations*. Hong Kong: H.K. Buddhist Book Distributor, 1980.

Sheng-Yen (Master), *Faith in Mind: A Guide to Ch'an Practice*. Taipei: Tungchu Pub., 1989.

Shih Shing-yun (Master), ed., *Bilingual Buddhist Series*. Taipei: Buddhist Cultural Service, 1962.

Sutra Translation Committee of the United States and Canada, tr., *The Buddhist Liturgy*. Thornhill, Ont. and Bronx, NY, 1983.

Suzuki, D.T., *An Introduction to Zen Buddhism*. New York: Grove Weidenfeld, 1964.

Tanaka, Kenneth K. *The Dawn of Chinese Pure Land Buddhist Doctrine*. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1990.

Tanaka, Kenneth K., "Where is the Pure Land?" In *Pacific World*, Fall 1987, p. 38ff.

Thích Thiền Tâm (Master), *Buddhism of Wisdom and Faith*. Sepulveda, Ca: International Buddhist Monastic Institute, 1991. (Reprinted by The Corporate Body of the Buddha Educational Foundation, Taipei.)

Thurman, Robert, tr., *The Holy Teaching of Vimalakirti: A Mahayana Scripture*. University Park, Pa and London: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1981.

Selective Index

Adversities 188
Alaya 126
Amitabha 2; 185
Amitabha as Self-Nature see "Mind"
Amitabha Sutra 17; 18; 40; 71ff; 74; 185; 200
Ascetic practices 2; 156
Asvaghosha 46; 174
Avalokitesvara 162
Avatamsaka Sutra 6; 16-17; 21; 45; 50; 52; 58; 61; 65; 66; 99; 153; 158; 159; 178; 180; 185
Awakening of the Faith (treatise) 46; 147; 150; 174

Bardo 43; 186
Birth, Non-Birth see "Non-Birth"
Bodhi Mind 70; 165; 186
Body
-- Buddha Body 186; 199
-- Human body 32ff
Buddha Recitation methods 2; 5-6; 55-66; 97ff 186
Common Residence Pure Land see "Land of Common Residence"
Conditioned 186
Degenerate Age see "Dharma-Ending Age"
Demonic realms 53; 126ff; 134ff
Dharma Door 4
Dharma-Ending Age 2; 18; 40; 41; 187
Dharma Nature 52; 187
Dharma Realm 52; 187
Dharmakara 187
Diamond Sutra 12; 113; 115ff; 123; 130

Difficult Path 10; 20ff; 187
Disgust vs. joyfulness 31
Door of Emptiness 4; 52
Door of Existence 4; 52
Dreams see "Illusion"
Easy Path 11; 20; 188
Emptiness 3; 52; 153; 188
Enlightenment 9; 40
Esoteric School see
"Tantric School"
Eternalism 189
Evil Paths 189
Existence 3; 5; 153
Expedience 24; 163; 180; 189
Fa Yen (Master) 39; 171

Faith 19; 173
Five Grave Offenses 189
Five Houses of Zen 47; 190
Five Turbidities 9; 190
Flower Store World 190
Four Great Debts 190
Four Options (verses) 39
Good Spiritual Advisor 26; 190

Heart Sutra 136; 161
Holding the Name 66; 179
Illusion 3; 113; 131
Insight into Non-arising see
"Tolerance of Non-Birth"
Indra 6; 50
Jewel Net of Indra 6; 50
Joyfulness in Vows 31
Karma 21
Kuan Yin see "Avalokitesvara"
Kung an 161; 174
Land of Eternally Tranquil Light 50
Land of Expediency 49; 69; 177
Land of True Reward 49; 69; 177

Land of Common Residence 50; 69; 177
Land of Ultimate Bliss see "Pure Land"
Lankavatara Sutra 118; 124; 135; 158; 191
Liturgy for deceased monks 47-48
Lotus Sutra 17; 70; 122; 191

Ma Tsu 191
Maharatnakuta Sutra 42; 46; 62
Maitreya 23ff; 192
Manjusri 192
Marks 56; 64; 77; 130; 192
Meditation Sutra 17; 30; 46; 56; 57; 60; 64; 79; 81; 155; 170; 200
Middle Way 192
Milinda (King) 83
Mind 3-4; 27; 77ff; 81; 90; 192
Mind-Only 3; 49ff; 51ff; 53ff; 58; 160
Nagarjuna 46; 175
Nature and Marks 3; 77
Nihilism 193
Non-Birth 9; 12ff; 76-77; 193 see also "Tolerance of Non-Birth"
Non-dual 183; 193
Non-retrogression 19-20; 22ff; 42; 70; 84ff
Noumenon 21; 59; 193

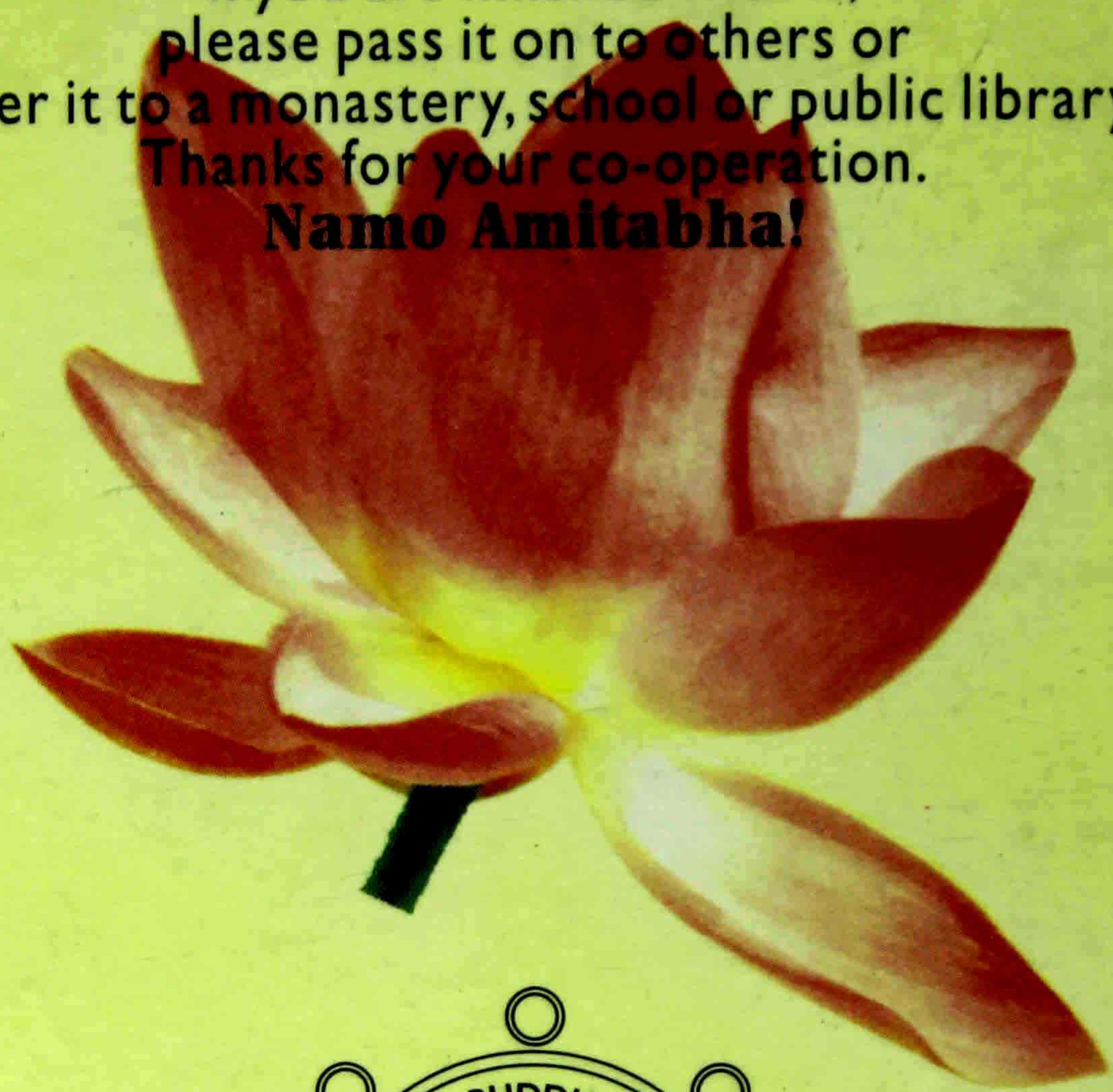
Ocean Seal (Samadhi) 51; 177; 195
Ocean-Wide Assembly 195
One-Life Bodhisattva 195
One-pointedness of Mind 60; 195
Other-power 2; 18ff; 157; 195
Pai Chang (Master) 47; 176
Paramitas 1; 2; 4; 195
Path of Sages 195
Perfect Teaching 195
Phenomena 193
Platform Sutra 116; 117; 122
Pure Land 18; 36; 75; 196; 203
Pure Land sutras see "Three Pure Land Sutras"

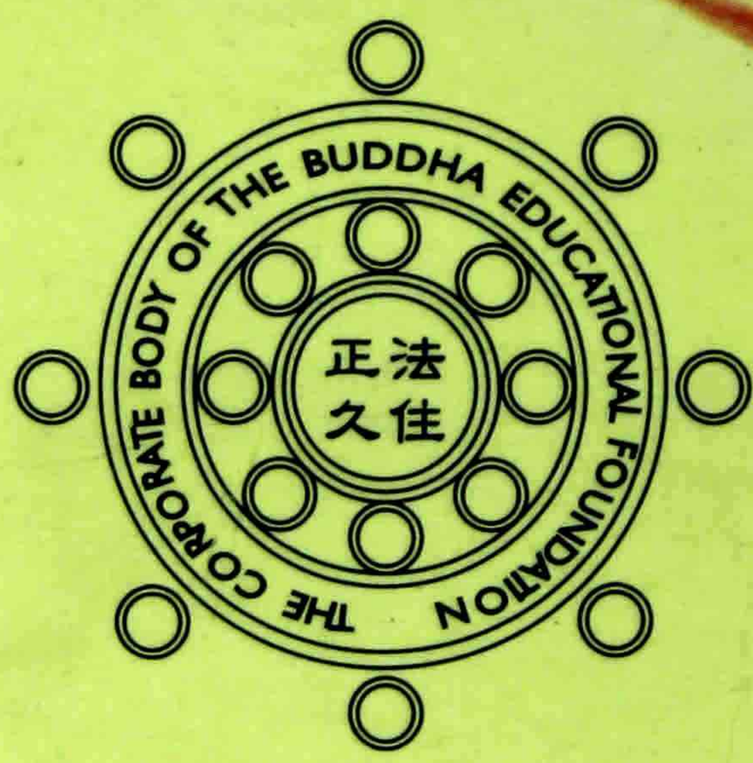
Pure Land/Zen 109
Pure Rules of Pai Chang 47-48; 176
Response from the Buddha 106
Saha World 44; 69; 70; 114; 196
Samadhi 196
Samantabhadra 46; 65ff; 180; 196
Sariputra 70; 197
Self-Nature Amitabha see "Mind"

Self-power 2; 4; 15ff; 18ff; 197
Seven Treasures 171; 197
Skillful means see "Expedience"
Subduing and Gathering 74
see also "Expedience"
Sudden Teaching 5
Sukhavati see "Pure Land"
Sundry Practices 61ff
Surangama Sutra 49; 60; 149
T'an Lun 169
Tantric School 1; 2; 156

Ten Great Vows 61; 178; 198
Ten Recitation Method 30; 48; 97ff; 198
Ten Stages (Bodhisattvas) 11; 163
Ten Virtues 23ff; 29; 199
Theravada 2; 4
Three Pure Land Sutras 200
T'ien T'ai 1; 5; 56
Tolerance of Non-Birth 9-11; 44; 200
Tusita Heaven 23ff
Two Truths 14; 202
Ultimate Truth/Meaning 203
Vows 82; 198
Western Land see "Pure Land"
Women 25; 169
Yin Kuang (Master) 65
Yung Ming (Master) 171
Zen 1; 2; 4; 5; 39; 52; 108-109; 145; 150; 153; 156ff; 160; 164; 172-174; 184 see also "Five Houses of Zen"

As this is a Dhamma text,
we request that it be treated with respect.
If you are finished with it,
please pass it on to others or
offer it to a monastery, school or public library.
Thanks for your co-operation.
Namo Amitabha!





Reprinted and donated for free distribution by
The Corporate Body of the Buddha Educational Foundation
11F., 55 Hang Chow South Road Sec 1, Taipei, Taiwan, R.O.C.
Tel:886-2-23951198, Fax:886-2-23913415
Email:overseas@budaedu.org.tw
Website: http://www.budaedu.org.tw
This book is for free distribution, it is not to be sold.
Printed in Taiwan
EN059