

AN INSPIRATION
TO
GIVE RISE TO THE BODHI MIND

勸發菩提心文

Fo Guang Shan International Translation Center

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Incense Praise

Incense burning in the censer,

All space permeated with fragrance.

The Buddhas perceive it from every direction,

Auspicious clouds gather everywhere.

With our sincerity,

The Buddhas manifest themselves in their entirety.

We take refuge in the bodhisattvas-mahasattvas.

Homage to Our Teacher Sakyamuni Buddha

(repeat three times)

Sutra Opening Verse

The unexcelled, most profound, and exquisitely
wondrous Dharma
Is difficult to encounter throughout hundreds of
thousands of millions of kalpas.
Since we are now able to see, hear, receive and
retain it,
May we comprehend the true meaning of the
Tathagata.

An Inspiration to Give Rise to the Bodhi Mind

This unworthy and common monk, Shixian, weeping tears of blood, sincerely bows and pleads to the great assembly and to all the faithful: Please be compassionate, listen for a moment, and reflect upon my words. Once I have heard that the main gate for entering the path is first to give rise to a bodhi mind; among the urgent tasks of cultivation, the foremost is to make a vow. [...]

[...] Having a vow, all beings can be liberated; having a bodhi mind, Buddhahood is attainable. Yet, without a great mind, and a firm and profound vow, one is trapped in the cycle of birth and death through countless kalpas. Even with endless cultivation, it would still be in vain. The *Flower Adornment Sutra* says, “Forgetting the bodhi mind but cultivating wholesomeness is called the action of mara.” If forgetting the bodhi mind is like this, what more would it be for one who has never set one’s mind on the bodhi path. Therefore, if one wishes to learn the Tathagata Vehicle, one must give rise to one’s bodhi mind without delay.

There are many vows with different forms. Without an explanation, how is one to know the right path? For this reason, I briefly describe it as follows. There are eight forms of vows: evil, right, true, false, great, small, partial, and perfect. But, what do “evil, right, true, false, great, small, partial, and perfect” mean?

There are some people who practice without understanding their minds; they are only concerned with external appearances. Some people seek offerings of wealth and gifts; some people seek fame and a good reputation; some people crave present pleasures or future effects. [...]

[...] Any initiation of mind like this is called false.

If one does not seek offerings, fame, and a good reputation, pleasure or future effects, and one's only concern is for the bodhi path of liberation from birth and death, it is called right mind.

If one seeks, thought by thought, the Buddha Way above, and one wishes to liberate all sentient beings, mind after mind, below; if one learns that Buddhahood is long and far away but never fears and retreats; if one contemplates that sentient beings are difficult to rescue, but never tires; if, like climbing a mountain of a thousand miles, eventually one shall reach the summit; if, like climbing a tower of nine floors, in the end one shall reach the pinnacle; this is called true mind.

If one commits wrongdoing but does not repent, knows of a vice but does not remove it; if one is clean on the outside, yet filthy inside, diligent at the beginning and idle at the end; if one has a good heart but one's deed is mixed with the desire for fame and fortune; and if one has the practices of wholesomeness but is polluted by action of wrongdoing; this is called false mind.

If, having liberated all sentient beings, one's vow is completed; if, having attained Buddhahood, one's vow is fulfilled, it is called great mind.

If one contemplates the three realms as a prison and the cycle of birth and death as the enemy; if one aims for self-liberation, not for the liberation of all, it is called small mind.

If one sees there are sentient beings and Buddhahood outside of one's mind and makes a vow to liberate sentient beings and to attain Buddhahood; and if one is not able to forget one's merits and break through worldly knowledge and views; this is called a partial mind.

If one realizes that one's intrinsic nature is as a sentient being and therefore one vows to liberate it; that one's intrinsic nature is Buddhahood and therefore one vows to attain it; that there is no existence of a phenomenon away from one's mind; that using a mind of

emptiness, one makes a vow of emptiness, practices the way of emptiness, and achieves the fruit of emptiness; and that, however, even emptiness, in actuality, has no form; this is called a perfect mind.

To know these eight different forms of a vow is to know how to examine them. Having right examination, one knows how to accept and how to reject. Knowing how to accept and reject, one can give rise to the bodhi mind. How does one examine them? In setting one's mind, there are these eight forms, so which is evil, and which is right? Which is true, and which is false? Which is great, and which is small? Which is partial, and which is perfect? How does one accept and reject? [...]

[...] One should reject an evil, false, small, and partial mind but accept a right, true, great, and perfect mind. If one initiates such a mind, it is called the initiation of true bodhi mind.

The bodhi mind is the king of all wholesomeness, yet there must be some causes and conditions that lead one to set one's mind on bodhi. There are ten causes and conditions that help one to initiate the bodhi mind. The first is being mindful of the Buddha's deep kindness. The second is being mindful of our parents' deep kindness. The third is being mindful of our teachers' deep kindness. The fourth is being mindful of our benefactors' deep kindness. [...]

[...] The fifth is being mindful of all sentient beings' deep kindness. The sixth is being mindful of the suffering of life and death. The seventh is having respect for our own spiritual being. The eighth is being repentant of karmic hindrances. The ninth is aspiring toward rebirth in the Pure Land. The tenth is being mindful of the importance of preserving the right Dharma for a long time.

Why should we be mindful of the Buddha's deep kindness? Since his first initiation of bodhi mind, Sakyamuni Buddha practiced the bodhisattva path and endured immeasurable suffering through countless kalpas for us. When we commit wrongdoing, the Buddha teaches us with skillful means out of his compassion, yet we are too ignorant to accept. [...]

[...] When we fall into hell, the Buddha is full of sorrow and pain. He wishes to suffer instead of us, but our karma is too heavy and it cannot be helped. When we are human, the Buddha uses skillful means to teach us how to plant the root of wholesomeness. He guides us in our endless rebirth, unwilling to abandon us for a single moment. When the Buddha appeared in the world, we were in the mire. Now that we are human, the Buddha has already entered nirvana. How much wrongdoing must we have committed that we were born in this declining period of the Dharma! What merits must we have acquired that we have renounced the household life! [...]

[...] What obstacle do we face that hinders us from meeting the Buddha's golden body? How fortunate we are that we can pay homage to his relics! Without the past root of wholesomeness, how could we learn the Dharma? Without learning the Dharma, how could we be aware of the Buddha's kindness? His kindness and virtues are much higher than a mountain. If we do not initiate the great mind to practice the bodhisattva path, to propagate the Dharma, and to liberate all beings, even if we were to crush our bodies to do so, how can we repay this kindness? This is the first cause and condition of the initiation of the bodhi mind.

Why should we be mindful of our parents' deep kindness? Our compassionate parents have indeed suffered to labor hard for our care, carrying us to term for ten lunar months and through three years of nursing, and endless diaper changes to bring us up. They swallow the bitter and give us sweetness. They hope that we will continue the family lineage and revere our ancestors. Renouncing the household life, we are now the so-called sons of Sakya, and monastics. We can provide for our parents no more, nor can we revere our ancestors properly. We can neither support them, nor can we liberate them. From a worldly view, we have caused great loss. [...]

[...] From the view of the supra-mundane, we have little to contribute. As a failure both ways, our heavy wrongdoings are not easy to get rid of. Consider this: The only possible repayment is to consistently practice the Buddha Way, through hundreds of kalpas and in thousands of lives, to liberate sentient beings of the ten directions in the three time periods. Then all beings are liberated, not just our parents of this life, but our parents of all lifetimes. Thus, not only our are parents liberated but also the parents of all people. This is the second cause and condition of the initiation of the bodhi mind.

Why should we be mindful of our teachers' deep kindness? [...]

[...] Although our parents give us life, we would not know morals and manners if there were no teachers of worldly knowledge, and we would not understand the Dharma if there were no teachers of Buddhism. Without knowing morals and manners, are we not just like animals? Without understanding the Dharma, are we not just like an ordinary person? Now we have a little knowledge of morals and manners, understood the basic concept of Buddhism, worn the monastic's robes, and upheld the pure precepts—are these not due to the guidance of our teachers? If we were seeking only a small goal, it would only benefit ourselves. Now, we strive for the great vehicle and vow universally to benefit everyone, [...]

[...] so the teachers of worldly knowledge and the teachers of Buddhism also receive benefits. This is the third cause and condition of the initiation of the bodhi mind.

Why should we be mindful of our benefactors' deep kindness? For what I enjoy and consume are not only dependent on my strength. Two meals per day, clothes for the four seasons, medicine in time of sickness, and whatever helps sustain the mouth and body—all of these daily necessities come from the kindness of others' effort. They work very hard and still barely scrape by, yet I am sitting here to consume a meal and do not feel content.

They work hard to barely cover their bodies, while I am here secure and comfortable. Have I yet learned to appreciate this? They live in humble cottages, busy and distressed their entire lives, while we live in grand buildings and spend our lives leisurely. They labor for our enjoyment; how can our minds be peaceful? They harvest for our consumption; is this fair? If we do not cultivate compassion and wisdom, and adorn ourselves with merits and knowledge to repay all benefactors and give benefit to all beings, [...]

[...] then for all of these contributions—each grain of rice, each inch of cloth—unwholesome karma will be difficult to escape. This is the fourth cause and condition for the initiation of bodhi mind.

Why should we be mindful of sentient beings' deep kindness? For countless kalpas, we and all sentient beings have been related as parents and children life after life, so we should have gratitude for one another. The confusion of not recognizing each other is caused by rebirth. If we contemplate this deeply, how can we not repay them? The one with fur and horns could be our parent from before; [...]

[...] the one crawling or flying could be our father. When a child separates from his parents at childhood, he cannot recognize his parents as an adult. It must only be more so through the separation of rebirths. They may be suffering in hell or as hungry ghosts. Who is to know their pain? Who is to know their hunger? Even when I do not see and hear them, they must be pleading for help to be liberated. If there were no sutras, such a statement could not be established. If there were no Buddha, who could discourse on his words? [...]

[...] For those with deviant views, how can they know this? Therefore, a bodhisattva views an ant as if it were one's parent from past lives, and as if it were a Buddha in the future, and always thinks to benefit it and repay its kindness. This is the fifth cause and condition for the initiation of bodhi mind.

Why should we be mindful of the suffering of life and death? For endless kalpas, we and all sentient beings have been trapped in the cycle of birth and death and have not been liberated. We have been born in heaven and on earth, here and there, ten thousand times, ascending and falling in an instant. One moment we are in heaven; the next, we are back on earth. [...]

[...] Then follows a fall to hell, as an animal or a hungry ghost. We leave the gate of darkness at dawn and return at dusk. The moment we are released from an iron jail, we return immediately. As we climb up a mountain of knives, no skin is left unscarred; as we climb up a tree of swords, our flesh is shredded to pieces. Hot iron can relieve no hunger; swallowing it burns the stomach, liver and intestines. Boiling copper can quench no thirst; drinking it chars the flesh and bone. We may be sawed in half, but the body comes back together again.

[...] When the wind blows, one is resurrected. In the midst of the fierce fire in hell, who could tolerate the moans of pain? In the hot frying pan, all one hears is the cry of suffering.

In the freezing hell, the skin turns blue like a lotus bud while the flesh cracks open, exposing wounds like a red lotus blossom. In one night, those in hell experience death and birth ten thousand times. In one morning, they experience the pain and suffering of one hundred years in the human world. Are we not overburdening the jailers? Who would believe the King of Hell's admonishment?

When we suffer, we know that is suffering, but no regret can help. Once out of the trap, we are doing the same as before. Whipping the donkey, who can know the sorrow of our mother? Slaughtering a swine, who can tell the pain of a father? Even a nobleman, such as King Wen of Zhou, did not know he was eating his own son's flesh. All of us are the same.

Lovers in previous lives might now be enemies. Foes in previous lives might be our families today. Our mother in previous lives might now be our bride. The father-in-law in previous lives might be today's groom.
[...]

[...] If one knew this with the knowledge of past lives, one would indeed feel shame. If one could see this with heavenly eyes, one would find it ridiculous.

We spend ten lunar months hiding in the midst of filth and feces, then in an instant we descend in a path of blood and pus in a pitiable state. As children we cannot distinguish between east and west; while we are adults, we learn some knowledge, then greed arises. In a moment, aging and sickness come to us. In a flash, impermanence arrives and death comes.

In the midst of wind and fire, our consciousness decays. Our spirit and blood become exhausted, and our skin and flesh wither and dry up from the outside in. [...]

[...]We feel as if every single hair is piercing us, and every pore is a cut by knife. When a turtle is being cooked in a broiler, removing its shell is easy; when our consciousness departs from our body, it is much more difficult than that.

The mind is the host of impermanence; it is like a merchant who travels everywhere. Our bodies have no fixed form; they are like houses that one frequently moves into and out of. The number of bodies we have had is greater than all the specks of dust in the universe. The number of tears we have shed when taking leave is greater than the waves of the four seas. The bones that were once mine pile up higher than a mountain. [...]

[...] The heaps of corpses could cover the entire earth.

If it were not for the Buddha's discourse, who would ever hear and see such a truth? If it were not for reading the sutras, who could ever awaken and understand? Just as before, we harbor desire and are confused by ignorance. The only thing we are afraid of is undergoing thousands of lives across myriad kalpas, making the same mistakes again and again. A human body is difficult to obtain but easy to lose. This good opportunity goes by fast, and it is difficult to get it back.

On the road of darkness, once separated, we will not meet for a long time. With the unwholesome karmic effect of the three lower realms, one reaps what one sows. The suffering is beyond words. Who would stand in for us? [...]

[...] The mere mention of it brings chills to one's heart. Thus, we should get out of the cycle of birth and death, escape from the sea of craving and desire, and bring liberation to others and ourselves so that everyone can reach the other shore. This is no doubt the noblest deed. This is the sixth cause and condition for the initiation of bodhi mind.

What is having respect for our own spiritual being? We have the same essence of mind as Sakya-muni Buddha. Why has the Buddha attained supreme, perfect enlightenment for immeasurable kalpas, while we remain ignorant and confused as ordinary people?
[...]

[...] The Buddha has immeasurable supernatural powers and wisdom and the adornments of merits and virtues, while we have immeasurable karma and affliction, and are strangled by life and death. The nature of mind is identical, but the difference between ignorance and enlightenment is like a deep abyss. While reflecting on this, do we not feel embarrassed? It is like a priceless gem discarded in a mud puddle—not treasured. Therefore, we should use the immeasurable wholesome teachings to cure our affliction, to cultivate and accumulate virtues and merits. [...]

[...] Our nature of virtues will then be revealed. It is as if the priceless gem has been washed and cleaned. It is then hung high from the ceiling. It sparkles with brilliance, bringing illumination to all. Thus, we are not betraying the Buddha's teaching, and we can live up to our own true mind. This is the seventh cause and condition for the initiation of bodhi mind.

What is being repentant of karmic hindrances? The sutra says, "Even committing the tiniest wrongdoing will result in hell for the duration of five hundred years of four heavenly kings." It must be indescribable for committing a major wrongdoing. [...]

[...] For what we consume and use, for every thought and action, we break the precepts constantly. For each meal and drink we violate numerous precepts.

In a day, we make countless errors. In a lifetime, our errors must be incalculable. Nine out of ten people cannot uphold even the five precepts. Most of them also hide their offenses, instead of honestly repenting. The five precepts are only precepts for laypeople, yet they are not upheld. If we cannot uphold them, then how much more difficult it is for the sramanera, bhiksu, and bodhisattva precepts. [...]

[...] In name, we may be a bhikṣu. In fact, we are not even an upasaka. Should we not be ashamed?

Once we have received the precept, we should uphold it and not break it. Once we break the precept, it will cause us to retreat from the Way. If we fail to take pity on ourselves and others, or we hurt ourselves and others, we should weep and repent our wrongdoings with our sincere mind and body in front of all sentient beings. Otherwise, it would be difficult to escape from our unwholesome karma for ten thousand kalpas. [...]

[...] This is the eighth cause and condition for the initiation of bodhi mind.

Why should we aspire to rebirth in the Pure Land? While cultivating in this world, it is very difficult to make progress on the Way. In the Pure Land, it is very easy to attain Buddhahood. Because it is so easy, one may attain Buddhahood in one lifetime. Because it is so difficult here, one may not attain it even after many kalpas.

Therefore the sages and saints of the past have all followed this direction. It is discoursed in ten thousand sutras and treatises, and numerous teachings point to this Way. It is the most ideal method of cultivation in the Age of Declining Dharma. But the sutra also states that little merits and virtues will not cause one to be

reborn in the Pure Land; only abundant merit does. It is said that to increase merits, the best way is to chant the Buddha's name; to increase wholesomeness, the best way is to initiate the bodhi mind.

A moment of chanting earns more merits than a hundred years of giving. One instant of initiating a great mind surpasses many kalpas of cultivation. In chanting the Buddha's name, one inherently hopes to become a Buddha; if one does not initiate a great mind, then how is it useful to recite the Buddha's name?

Making the initiation of a great mind is inherent to cultivation. If one is not reborn in the Pure Land, then even with the initiation of a great mind, it is easy to retreat. Therefore, one must first sow the seed of bodhi, plow by chanting the Buddha's name, and then

the fruit of Buddhahood will naturally increase. If we board the boat of great vows and sail into the sea of the Pure Land, then we will certainly be reborn in the Pure Land. This is the ninth cause and condition for the initiation of bodhi mind.

Why should we be mindful of the importance of preserving the right Dharma for a long time? For immeasurable kalpas, the Buddha has cultivated the bodhi path for us. He navigated the impassable, endured the intolerable, and he completed all that is necessary to attain Buddhahood. Once the Buddha attained enlightenment, he taught to all he could, then entered nirvana. The ages of the Right Dharma and Semblance Dharma had passed. [...]

[...] In this Age of Declining Dharma, his teachings do not have many true followers.

There is no distinction between right and deviant, right and wrong. People boast of their cultivation and chase after fame and fortune—so many are like this in the world. Do they know who is the Buddha? What is the Dharma? What is Sangha? Degeneration to such a degree is truly intolerable to mention. Once one thinks of this, one's tears flow unconsciously.

I am a son of the Buddha! I am not able to repay his kindness; there is no benefit to myself and others. When I am alive, I do not benefit beings. [...]

[...] When I die, I do not benefit my descendants. Though the sky is high, it cannot cover me; though the earth is thick, it cannot carry me. Among the most serious wrongdoers, am I not one?

Even with such intolerable pain, I do not have any good plan. So I ignore how deluded I am, and I instantly set the initiation of a great mind. Even if we cannot halt the decline of the Dharma now, we can determinedly vow to protect the right Dharma for future lives.

Thus, I and some good friends come to the temple for repentance and establish this Dharma function. We make the forty-eight vows: [...]

[...] each vow is to liberate all sentient beings and hope with the profound mind of hundreds of thousands of kalpas that each mind will become a Buddha.

From now to an endless future, our goal is to be reborn in the Pure Land. Once we reach the nine ranks of the Western Pure Land, then we will return to this world to liberate sentient beings. Let the Buddha's light shine again, and the gate of the Dharma will reopen. All monastics will be pious and righteous and liberate people here. Then the true Dharma will be prolonged. This is indeed my sincere intention. [...]

[...] This is the tenth cause and condition for the initiation of bodhi mind.

Once we have known the ten causes and conditions and eight forms of vows, then we have a direction and a method of cultivation. Just consider how fortunate we are to be human, to be able to live here, with six sense organs and good health, with true faith and no distractions of mara. Moreover, we have renounced the home life, upheld the precepts, lived in temples, learned the Dharma, paid homage to relics, practiced repentance, [...]

[...] among good friends, in such wonderful conditions. If we do not initiate a great mind today, then when do we wait for?

Sincerely I pray to the great assembly, please have compassion for my will. Let us all join hands and make the bodhi mind. Those who have not yet done so, do so now. Those who have already done so, renew the vows again. Never retreat out of fear of difficulties. Do not slight the vows as something easily done. Never rush and lose your determination. Do not be lazy and without courage. [...]

[...] Never be pessimistic and take no action. Do not be passive and wait idly for things to be done. Do not allow ignorance or lack of determination to stop you. Do not debase yourself or think you have no share because of shallow roots.

For example, in planting trees, one that was planted a long time ago has roots that have grown from shallow to deep. Like honing a knife, grinding makes a blunt object sharp by time. How could we give up planting a tree because of shallow roots and let it wither by itself? Are we to throw away the knife just because the blade is blunt? If we consider cultivation to be painful, it is because we do not know laziness causes more pain. [...]

[...] Cultivation is hard for a while, but you will get tranquility forever. Being lazy is easy for a lifetime, but it will cause you suffering for many lifetimes.

With the Pure Land as our ferry boat, why are we worried about regression? If we attain the patience of non-arising, why are we afraid of difficulties? We should know the wrongdoers in hell who had initiated the bodhi mind in previous lives. How could we, as humans and sons of the Buddha, not make a great vow in this life? It is in vain to regret our beginningless ignorance. It is not too late to be awakened and initiate the bodhi mind now.

If we are still ignorant and not enlightened, it is a pity. If we know the truth, but do not practice, it is very sorrowful. If we are afraid of the pain of hell, then we must practice diligently. If you are mindful of the speed of impermanence, then you will not be lazy. With the Dharma as our motivator, in the company of good friends, do not miss this golden opportunity. Rely on their significance for the rest of our life, and there is no worry of regressing.

Do not say that a thought is trivial, do not think that an empty vow is totally in vain. A sincere mind can make things true, [...]

[...] and a profound vow can lead to further action. The vastness of the sky is not great, but the mind is great; a diamond is not firm, but the power of a vow is the firmest. May all of you retain my words. Let the bodhi friends join together now, and let the lotus association be established. May all of us be reborn in the Pure Land and see Amitabha Buddha together, mutually liberate sentient beings, and attain enlightenment at the same time. Who is to say that the future thirty-two marks of excellence of a noble person with the adornment of a hundred merits are not rooted in today's vow? [...]

[...] May it be encouraged. The future is bright and the possibilities are great!

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TRIPLE REFUGE

I take refuge in the Buddha, wishing that all sentient beings understand the Dharma and make the supreme vow.

I take refuge in the Dharma, wishing that all sentient beings study the sutras diligently and obtain an ocean of wisdom.

I take refuge in the Sangha, wishing that all sentient beings lead the masses in harmony without obstruction.

DEDICATION OF MERIT

May kindness, compassion, joy, and equanimity
pervade the dharma realms;
May all people and heavenly beings benefit from
our blessings and friendship;
May our ethical practice of Chan, Pure Land, and
Precepts help us to realize equality and patience;
May we undertake the great vows with humility
and gratitude.

Glossary

Age of Declining Dharma. Chinese: 末法. The Age of Declining Dharma is the period when the Buddha's teachings go into decline. Sentient beings misunderstand and cannot distinguish between true teachings and false ones, and become stubborn and difficult to teach. Meanwhile, non-Buddhist teachers who invoke the name of the Buddha do as they please.

Age of Right Dharma. Chinese: 正法. The Age of Right Dharma is the period not long after the Buddha has passed into final nirvana, during which his disciples are still able to maintain monastic discipline and uphold the Buddha's teachings in form and essence without misinterpretation.

Age of Semblance Dharma. Chinese: 像法. The Age of Semblance Dharma is the period after the Buddha's final nirvana has receded into the past, and the esteem and admiration that sentient beings hold for the Buddha's teachings have waned. Different ideas and understandings of the Buddha's teachings appear, and this leads to ideas about the Buddha's teachings that only resemble the Right Dharma.

bodhi. Chinese: 菩提. In Sanskrit and Pāli, “awakening” or “enlightenment”; liberation from the cycle of birth and death by means of perfecting spiritual practice and understanding.

bodhimind. Chinese: 菩提心. An aspiration to enlightenment. A mind that strives for enlightenment and to benefit all sentient beings.

bodhi path. Chinese: 菩提道. The path leading to the benefit of all sentient beings and the aspiration of enlightenment.

bodhisattva. Chinese: 菩薩. One who vows to attain Buddhahood and liberate all sentient beings from suffering. While the term can describe a practitioner anywhere on the path to Buddhahood, it usually refers to a class of beings who practice all perfections and remain in the world to help sentient beings achieve enlightenment.

bodhisattva path. Chinese: 菩薩道. The path that leads to accomplishing the bodhisattvas’ vows and liberating all sentient beings from suffering.

Buddha. Chinese: 佛陀. In Sanskrit, “Awakened One.” Though there are many Buddhas, the term typically refers to Sakyamuni Buddha, the historical Buddha and founder of Buddhism.

Buddhahood. Chinese: 佛道. It is the state of a Buddha’s attaining of enlightenment.

Buddhism. Chinese: 佛教. Founded by Sakyamuni Buddha around 2,500 years ago.

cycle of birth and death. Chinese: 生死輪迴; Sanskrit: samsara. Also known as transmigration. When sentient beings die, they are reborn into one of the six realms of existence (heavenly beings, asuras, humans, animals, hungry ghosts, and hell beings) in a continuous cycle due to the karmic effects of one's deeds.

Dharma. Chinese: 佛法. A Sanskrit term with multiple meanings, including truth, fundamental principle, and phenomena. When capitalized, it denotes both the ultimate truth and the Buddha's teachings. When the term appears lowercase, it refers to anything that can be thought of, experienced, or named. This usage is close in meaning to the concept of phenomena.

five precepts. Chinese: 五戒; Sanskrit: pancasila. The fundamental principles of conduct and discipline that were established by the Buddha for wholesome and harmonious living: to refrain from killing, from stealing, from sexual misconduct, from lying, and from consuming intoxicants.

Flower Adornment Sutra. Chinese: 大方廣佛華嚴經; Sanskrit: Mahavaipulya-buddhavatamsaka-sūtra. Also known as the Avatamsaka Sūtra. It has been the

foundation for many Buddhist thinkers and practitioners throughout the ages. It is the basis for the East Asian Huayan (華嚴) School of Buddhist philosophy.

Giving. Chinese: 布施. Giving is like planting a field: Regardless of the seeds being planted, they must be planted in a good field to yield a good harvest. Those who are worthy of respect are the best fields of merit, such as the Triple Gem, bodhisattvas, and arhats.

Great Vehicle. Chinese: 大乘. Also known as Mahayana Buddhism. It is one of the major branches of Buddhism, and is the form of Buddhism prominent in North Asia, including China, Mongolia, Tibet, Korea, and Japan.

Heaven of the Four Kings. Chinese: 四天王天. It is located on the upper slopes of Mount Sumeru, which is the lowest of the six heavens in the desire realm. There are four kings who are the protectors of the world guarding over the four cardinal directions: Dhrtarastra guards the east and commands the gandharvas; Virudhaka guards the south and commands kumbhandas; Virupaksa guards the west and commands the nagas; and Vaisravana, the chief of the four kings, guards the north and commands the yaksas.

intrinsic nature. Chinese: 自性. It has many names, including "Buddha nature," "Dharma body," "body of inherent purity," "Tathagata nature," and "awakened nature." It is a quality that is originally complete in and of itself. It cannot be influenced or altered by external factors.

kalpa. Chinese: 劫. An Indic unit of time measurement, roughly equivalent to the concept of an eon.

karma. Chinese: 業. All wholesome and unwholesome physical actions, speech, and thoughts, and their effects.

King of Hell. Chinese: 閻羅王. Also called King Yama or King of the Dead. He is said to supervise the hell realm.

King Wen of Zhou. Chinese: 周文王. King Wen of Zhou was king of Zhou during the late Shang dynasty in ancient China. He was born in 1152 BC and died in 1056 BC.

liberation. Chinese: 解脫; Sanskrit: vimoksa. Freedom from all afflictions, suffering, and the cycle of birth and death.

Māra. Chinese: 魔. In Sanskrit, a malevolent being that embodies desire and is an adversary of the Buddha. The name is also used to refer to mental qualities that impede spiritual progress.

nine ranks of the Western Pure Land. Chinese: 西方淨土九品. There are nine ranks of rebirth in the Pure Land. In the Contemplation of the Buddha of Infinite Life Sutra, the Sakyamuni Buddha mentions human beings can achieve rebirth into the Pure Land if they contemplate Amitabha or recite Amitabha's name.

nirvana. Chinese: 涅槃. In Sanskrit, "extinction." A state of perfect tranquility that is the ultimate goal of Buddhist practice. It refers to the absolute extinction of all afflictions and desires, the state of liberation beyond the cycle of birth and death.

patience of non-arising of phenomena. Chinese: 無生忍. Buddhism speaks of three levels of patience. The last and the highest of these comes from the realization that, on a supramundane level, phenomena do not truly arise or cease, all things are simply as they are.

precept. Chinese: 戒. The precepts are the basis for all good deeds, and the cornerstone of all moral conduct. The Buddha instructed his disciples to treat the precepts as their teacher when he was about to enter final nirvana.

Pure Land. Chinese: 淨土. A transcendent realm created through the power of a Buddha's vow to help ease the suffering of sentient beings, should they choose to be

reborn there. One of the most commonly discussed Pure Lands is the “Western Pure Land,” the realm where Amitabha Buddha presides. It came into existence due to Amitabha Buddha’s forty-eight great vows. Sentient beings can make a vow to be reborn there.

Sakyamuni Buddha. Chinese: 釋迦牟尼佛. Siddhartha Gautama, the historical Buddha and founder of the religion known today as Buddhism. The name Sakyamuni means sage of the Sakyans. Sakya was the name of his clan.

Sangha. Chinese: 僧伽. The Buddhist monastic community.

sentient being. Chinese: 有情 Sanskrit: sattva. Any being with consciousness, including heavenly beings, asuras, humans, animals, hungry ghosts, and hell beings. From the Mahāyāna viewpoint, all sentient beings inherently have Buddha nature and therefore possess the capacity to attain enlightenment.

Shixian. Chinese: 實賢. (1686-1734 AD) The ninth patriarch of the Pure Land School.

six sense organs Chinese: 六根. The six sense organs of human beings are eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body, and consciousness.

skillful means. Chinese: 方便. The ability to bring out the spiritual potentialities of different people by statements or actions that are adjusted to their needs and adapted to their capacity for comprehension.

Tathagata. Chinese: 如來. In Sanskrit, literally, "Thus Come One"; one of the ten epithets of the Buddha, meaning the one who has attained full realization of suchness, true essence, or actuality. One who dwells in the absolute beyond all transitory phenomena, with the ability to freely come and go everywhere.

thirty-two marks. Chinese: 三十二相. The "major and minor marks" refer to the Buddha's bodily appearance. Those characteristics that can be observed in a glance are known as "major marks," while those that are not directly perceived but produce a feeling of pleasantness are known as the Buddha's "notable characteristics." As recorded in the sutras, the Buddha was endowed with thirty-two marks of excellence and eighty notable characteristics.

three realms. The realms where sentient beings reside and transmigrate: the desire realm, the form realm, and the formless realm.

upasaka. A male lay follower of the Buddha who does not renounce the household life or enter a monastery

but still strives to live a spiritually cultivated life and upholds the teachings and the five precepts.

Way. Chinese: 道. “The Way” has long been a part of Chinese philosophy. In Buddhism, the Way refers both to the way we should live, as well as the way things are. The Way is the truth of Buddhism, as it exists in the world around us and within ourselves.

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