Starting a Daily Practice

Buddhism in Every Step D7
（英文版）

Venerable Master Hsing Yun

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Starting a Daily Practice

I. What Is Buddhist Practice?

As we live, we must strive for a life of value. Buddhism is different from philosophy, for it does not only deal with knowledge and theory. Rather, Buddhism calls for devout faith, developed morality, and most importantly, spiritual practice.

There are many people who want to learn about Buddhism but are preoccupied with other people, money, relationships, fame, fortune, and power. How can one expect to have any time to engage in spiritual practice with so much focus on honor or disgrace, right or wrong, praise or blame, and gain or loss?

All we need is the right intention to begin any form of spiritual practice, whether it is bowing to the Buddha, chanting sutras, repentance, meditation, or other such practices. Any of these can form the basis of a daily practice. One can also visit a Buddhist temple or monastery to participate in pilgrimages,

precept retreats, seminars, summer camps, short-term monastic retreats, or other such activities.

The main purpose of spiritual practice is to develop one's power of will. Just as porcelain plates and ceramic jars must be fired in a kiln or baked in the sun to become strong, we grow closer to recovering our true self through daily practices like offering incense, bowing to the Buddha, reading or chanting sutras, or meditation. By maintaining these practices regardless of how busy or idle we are, we will improve our temperament, purify our spirit, elevate our character, and enhance our vitality.

There are many different Buddhist practices, and you should choose those that work best for you. What is important is to not become attached to your practice and to not denigrate the practice of others. Some people may like to meditate, while others will benefit from reciting Amitabha Buddha's name. Chanting different sutras will resonate with different people. We should be flexible in our practice and always respectful of others.

This booklet provides basic information on Buddhist practice, as well as how to integrate Buddhist practice into your daily life. Let us begin with an introduction to two of the main forms of Buddhist practice: Chan meditation and Pure Land recitation.

II. Chan Practice

Chan practice involves many different methods for developing meditative concentration, but sitting meditation in particular is a very important practice for beginners. Sitting meditation allows us to experience the joys of meditative concentration and to begin to contemplate and investigate our intrinsic nature. Sitting meditation can be practiced anywhere: under trees, beside rivers, or on the tops of mountains. To begin the practice of sitting meditation, it is important to have some basic meditation knowledge and be familiar with the fundamentals.

Proper Meditation Posture

One of the fundamentals of sitting meditation is what to do with the body. Proper meditation posture can be described in the following seven points:

1. Sit straight with your legs crossed. If possible, put the right foot on the left thigh and the left foot on the right thigh. If this is not possible, you can just put one foot on top of the opposite thigh. These positions are ideal for balance and circulation, but if this is still too difficult, you can also sit with the legs crossed at the

shins. Sit on a cushion that is not too hard and not too soft, not too high and not too low.

2. Form the hands into the *mudra,* and place them in your lap. Lay one hand on top of the other with both palms facing up and the thumbs slightly touching.

3. Keep the back straight, and do not lean against a wall.

4. Keep the head and neck straight.

5. Relax your shoulders, so they are balanced and natural and the chest is flat. No part of your body should be tense. Although you should maintain good posture, you should also maintain a sense of ease.

6. Lightly join the lips together, and place the top of the tongue on the upper palate.

7. Close your eyes at least halfway, and look downward. Do not be distracted by the sights around you.

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Cultivating the Mind

After achieving a proper meditation posture, what should one do with the mind? One technique is to follow the "six wonderful methods," formulated by Master Zhiyi of Buddhism's Tiantai School.

1. Counting the Breath
Focus the mind by counting the breaths (from one to ten). Every time one loses count, begin again at one.

2. Following the Breath
Follow the breath as one inhales and exhales without counting. This is an easy and natural way to develop meditative concentration.

3. Stopping Delusion
Make the mind still and tranquil by putting an end to the mind's delusions and abiding in a state of non-thought. Once one has put a stop to these delusions, the mind will naturally become concentrated and wisdom will arise.

4. Seeing Truth
Often paired with the previous method, "seeing truth" means to see deeply into all phenomena and develop wisdom. This is often done by contemplating the five aggregates. The five aggregates are the five different

things that make up a sentient being: form, feeling, perception, mental formations, and consciousness. When practicing this method, each of the five aggregates are seen to be false so that one is able to break through their delusions and develop skillful wisdom without outflows.

5. Self-Reflection
When reflecting on the mind, one understands that the idea of the mind as the "knower" is untrue, and thus the attachment to the self will disappear on its own. Then the skillful wisdom without outflows will make all things clear.

6. Purification
When the mind is free of all attachments, everything becomes clear and pure. One develops wisdom that is truly clear, without outflows. This naturally ends confusion and allows one to realize the truth.

Of each of the six wonderful methods, following the breath is the most important, for one sees the breath move from activity to tranquility. One should see the breath move in and out, just like the cycle of birth and death or the arising and ceasing of phenomena. By seeing the breath, we can come to realize the Buddhist teaching that all things are impermanent, suffering, and empty. Once this is understood, the

attachment to the self is severed, and the higher states of self-reflection and purification are possible.

III. Pure Land Practice

Pure Land practice is grounded in what are called the "three supports": faith, vows, and practice. Faith is established first, for it is through faith that one begins to cultivate positive karma. Even with its great breadth, Buddhism cannot liberate those who lack faith. Faith is what allows one to make vows, and from these vows comes spiritual practice.

Faith

Before Amitabha Buddha was awakened, when he was still practicing as a bodhisattva, he made forty-eight vows to liberate sentient beings based on his faith in the Buddhas. One of these vows was that, if he became a Buddha, all beings who recite his name will be able to be reborn in his Pure Land. In the same way, faith in the vows of Amitabha Buddha is what can allow us to be reborn in the Pure Land.

Vows

In Pure Land practice, one vows to dedicate this life to be reborn in Amitabha Buddha's Western Pure

Land. Furthermore, one vows, having been reborn in the Western Pure Land, to return to the Saha world to liberate all sentient beings.

Practice

There are many forms of Pure Land practice, but in general they can be divided into three categories: first, reciting the name; second, visualizing the Pure Land; and third, contemplating true reality. Practicing any of these methods will lead to rebirth in the Pure land.

It is worthwhile to describe each of these practices a bit, for the three are quite different. Contemplating true reality means to come to realize the Buddha's *Dharmakaya*, the absolute aspect of the Buddha that pervades the universe. To do so is to attain *samadhi*, a deep state of meditative concentration. This practice is also found in the Chan School, for the mind that manifests through such practice is the Pure Land itself. This form of realization is very difficult and requires great spiritual capacity. For this reason it is rarely the primary form of Pure Land practice.

The next form of practice is visualizing the Pure Land. This refers specifically to sixteen elements of the Pure Land as described in *The Contemplation Sutra*. When these contemplations are practiced

skillfully, then the Pure Land will appear before us, whether our eyes are open or closed. Those who cultivate this practice are said to attain the "presence samadhi," in which they are able to perceive all Buddhas.

Visualizing the Pure Land is a practice both subtle and profound, and as such, it is not for everyone. Those with poor spiritual capacity, a lack of skillful means, insufficient energy, and a dull, shallow mind will find the practice very difficult. One must be sharp, possess a subtle mind, deep insight, skillful intelligence, and unflagging zeal. It is not easy, and as such, it is not a very accessible form of practice.

Next is the practice of reciting Amitabha Buddha's name. This practice is much easier than the two previously mentioned and can be cultivated by people of varying spiritual capacities. Reciting Amitabha Buddha's name with single-minded focus can lead to samadhi. As such, it is a very popular form of practice for average, busy people.

Reciting the name of Amitabha Buddha can be done in many different ways, depending on one's mental state and physical surroundings. One can recite loudly to counteract drowsiness and generate energy, or one can even recite silently in public places or mass transit. One can also recite somewhere in-between, such that each syllable is spoken clearly, heard clearly, and thought of clearly.

One can recite quickly, one word following right after the next, to help dispel distracting thoughts. Another technique is to recite quickly following each breath: reciting Amitabha Buddha's name ten times following an exhalation, and only then breathing in.

One can also use each recitation to reflect back on one's intrinsic nature or use each recitation to visualize Amitabha Buddha and his Pure Land. One can even practice bowing while reciting Amitabha Buddha's name. Reciting Amitabha Buddha's name can also be done with Buddhist prayer beads, moving one's fingers along one bead for each recitation, or even one bead for every ten recitations.

How to practice reciting Amitabha Buddha's name is entirely up to you. What is important is that we reach a state of selflessness. As the ancient sages said, "Reciting, yet not reciting; not reciting, yet reciting." Master Ouyi (1599–1655 CE) has said:

> *Whether or not one attains rebirth in the Pure Land will depend completely on whether or not there are faith and vows; to what level one is reborn in the Pure Land depends on how deeply one practices reciting Amitabha Buddha's name.*

There are many different methods of Pure Land practice, but at their core all of these practices reach

the mouth, the ear, and the mind: the mouth speaks the name of Amitabha Buddha clearly, the ear hears the name clearly, and each recitation appears clearly in the mind.

There is a story that, in the Western Pure Land, there is a storehouse full of eyes, ears, mouths, hands, feet, and so on. Why? Because there are some people who only see Amitabha Buddha with their eyes but do not recite his name with their mouths, so only their eyes are reborn in the Pure Land. In the same way, there are some people who only use their ears to hear and their feet to circumambulate the shrine. The meaning of this story is that our practice must be sincere and complete for us to be reborn in the Western Pure Land. To do so, we can develop the following attitudes while we recite the name of Amitabha Buddha:

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Recite Joyfully

We practice in order to be reborn in the Pure Land. We should think of how we will be reborn on a lotus flower in a land without the suffering of birth, old age, sickness, or death. The Pure Land is full of pagodas, terraces, and pavilions sheathed in gold and encrusted with jewels, and we will be surrounded by good Dharma friends from whom we can learn from and share our understanding. Moreover, Amitabha

Buddha will be there to personally deliver teachings. Is there anything more joyful than this?

When we have this attitude, we will feel joy with each recitation of Amitabha Buddha's name. We should practice until our arms sway, our feet dance, and each of us has a smile on our faces. In this way the mind will become pure, we will overflow with enthusiasm.

Recite Compassionately

We should recite Amitabha Buddha's name with a sense of compassion for the suffering of others. There is no greater suffering than the separation of death—and if we consider carefully, we ourselves have been traveling through the cycle of birth and death since beginningless time. Sometimes we are reborn as animals, and other times we are reborn in hell or as hungry ghosts. When will we ever be free? How can such suffering not bring us to tears? Only by relying on the compassion of Amitabha Buddha can we be pulled out from the deep ocean of pain and suffering and ascend to the Pure Land. If we recite the name of Amitabha Buddha with compassion, we can better develop a mind-to-mind connection with him and his great compassion.

Recite with Emptiness

The world we live in is an illusion, and our bodies are but a combination of the four great elements of earth, water, fire, and wind and the five aggregates of form, feeling, perception, mental formations, and consciousness. But reciting Amitabha Buddha's name is something we can rely on. We should free the mind of impediments so that we can single-mindedly recite the name of Amitabha Buddha. We should recite until the self disappears, heaven and earth crumble, and the world no longer exists—all that is left is our recitation.

This may sound impossible, but it is not so difficult. I myself have had such an experience. In 1954, I conducted an Amitabha Buddha recitation retreat in Ilan which lasted for seven days. During those seven days, I felt as light as if I were walking on clouds. When I woke up and brushed my teeth, it was as if my teeth recited, "Amituofo, Amituofo...." When I ate breakfast, my porridge seemed to say, "Amituofo, Amituofo...." Even at night when I slept, my dreams were crystal clear. Those seven days seemed to go by in a moment, for everything else had become empty, except my recitation of Amitabha Buddha's name. The practice allowed me to forget time and space and to feel the happiness of letting go of the mind and body.

Recite Sincerely

When I think of Amitabha Buddha's compassionate vows and his care for all sentient beings, I cannot help but feel a great sense of reverence. As I bow and recite Amitabha Buddha's name, I wish that all sentient beings will be liberated by his limitless light as soon as possible. We should recite Amitabha Buddha's name and bow before his image with such reverence and sincerity. Doing so will remove our karmic obstacles and increase our merit and wisdom.

When we seek the Dharma with such sincerity and reverence, every flower contains the Buddha's Dharmakaya. One need not use prayer beads, for every person, tree, field, house, telephone pole, and all things become like beads upon which we count our recitations.

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IV. Starting a Daily Practice

You can start your Buddhist practice right at home. Many Buddhists dedicate a room or a small space in their home specifically for their Buddhist practice. This place becomes the focus of one's meditation and recitation. Such a place can also be the center of one's devotional practices. It can be where one places a Buddha image, pays homage and bows to the Buddha, and makes offerings.

A Buddha statue should be located in a place of respect. A Buddha statue can be placed in the living room of a house at an elevated place. It is also possible to place a Buddha statue in a bedroom by placing it in a cabinet—opening the doors when one is engaging in spiritual practice and keeping them closed when one is not. It is also possible to mount an image of the Buddha in a picture frame, bring it out while in use, and keep it in a high place or out of sight otherwise.

Bowing before a Buddha statue is a common sign of devotion, humility and respect. Buddhists will often make three bows to the "Triple Gem": one to the Buddha, the teacher, one to the Dharma, the teaching, and one to the Sangha, the monastic community. Another common practice is to make offerings before a Buddha statue. Offerings need not be elaborate, some incense, flowers, water, or fruit is just fine.

It is important to be practical in regard to Buddhist practice. For example, when doing daily recitations one should not do so too loudly out of respect for one's neighbors. If someone knocks on the door or the phone rings during sutra chanting, simply mark one's place with a piece of paper or a bookmark and resume again once the matter has been dealt with. One's practice should take shape around how much time one has in the day. Some suggestions:

1-Minute Practice

- Bow or join one's palms before a Buddha statue at a home shrine or when passing a Buddhist temple.
- Offer incense, flowers, or a cup of water before a Buddha statue.
- Recite Amitabha Buddha's name three times.
- Chant the four-line verse from *The Diamond Sutra*.

2-Minute Practice

- Chant *The Heart Sutra* during one's household chores, like sweeping the floor, cooking dinner, or washing the car.
- Chant the ten great vows of Samantabhadra Bodhisattva.
- Bow to the Buddha three times.

5-Minute Practice

- Before going to bed or right after waking up, sit calmly and observe the mind for five minutes.
- Recite the name of Amitabha Buddha by exhaling, reciting ten times quickly, and only then breathing in.
- Chant *The Eight Realizations of a Bodhisattva Sutra*.

10-Minute Practice

- Chant the "The Universal Gate Chapter" of *The Lotus Sutra*, *The Amitabha Sutra*, or *The Great Compassion Dharani* and *Ten Short Mantras*.

15-Minute Practice

- Chant *The Diamond Sutra*.
- Bow to the Buddha with twelve slow, mindful bows.
- Sit in meditation and contemplate the mind.

30-Minute Practice

- Sit in meditation, and contemplate the mind.
- Recite Amitabha Buddha's name continuously.
- Bow to the Buddha with twenty-four slow, mindful bows.
- Chant a chapter from *The Lotus Sutra* or *The Flower Adornment Sutra*.

60-Minute Practice

- Chant *The Amitabha Sutra* or *Universal Gate Sutra*, recite Amitabha Buddha's name, circumambulate a Buddha statue, and dedicate the merit.
- Chant *The Diamond Sutra* three to five times.
- Chant *The Great Compassion Dharani* twelve, twenty-four, thirty-two, or up to one hundred and eight times.

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V. Participating in Group Practice

If one would like to participate in a group practice environment, many temples offer weekly services, such as Amitabha Chanting Services. An Amitabha Chanting Service is a group gathering to recite the name of Amitabha Buddha that will typically take place at the same time each week in a Chinese Buddhist temple. This type of group practice can collectively encourage each participant to advance spiritually as well as fostering a sense of fellowship among the participants. The power of group practice is much greater than practicing alone, for the fervor of reciting Amitabha Buddha's name with such expressiveness allows the chanting to flow into one's heart. A typical Amitabha chanting service is organized in this way:

1. Singing the "Praise of Incense Offerings."
2. Chanting "We take refuge in the Buddhas and Bodhisattva of the Great Lotus Pond Assembly" three times.
3. Chanting the entire *Amitabha Sutra*, followed by three recitations of the *Rebirth in the Pure Land Dharani*.
4. Singing the "Praise to Amitabha Buddha."
5. Chanting Amitabha Buddha's name: *namo omituofo*
6. Circumambulating the Buddha statue.

7. Three bows each to Amitabha Buddha, Avalokitesvara Bodhisattva, Mahasthamaprapta Bodhisattva, and the pure, ocean-like assembly of bodhisattvas.
8. Ten minutes of sitting meditation (optional)
9. Taking the Triple Refuge.
10. Dedication of merit.
11. Listening to a Dharma talk.

When visiting a Buddhist temple and participating in group practice for the first time, it is important to behave with courtesy and consideration as one learns the rules of that particular temple. However, there are some general guidelines to keep in mind when visiting any temple. First, one should not smoke or drink alcohol at a temple, nor should one bring non-vegetarian food or pets. One should dress in a manner that is plain and simple. Many temples do not allow one to wear shoes in the shrine room; shoes are to be placed neatly to the side in a shoe cabinet. During services, men and women are often separated to the east and west sides of the shrine. Also, while in the shrine, one should speak softly

Some lay Buddhists have black robes that signify they have taken refuge in the Triple Gem. If you have brought such a robe, it is best to put the robe on first before entering the shrine. If you do not have such a

robe, it is best to stand near the back of the shrine to maintain the dignified atmosphere of the hall.

During a service, one shouldn't fidget so as not to disturb others. If you are not sure how to chant correctly, simply chant softly and follow along with the group. When circumambulating the shrine, focus the body and mind by concentrating on the sound of the chanting so as not to have distracting thoughts.

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Appendix of Chanting Texts

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In *Starting a Daily Practice,* Venerable Master Hsing Yun recommends many different kinds of Buddhist practice, including chanting various sutras and *mantras.* To assist the reader in beginning his or her own practice, some of these texts have been reproduced here.

The most common Pure Land practice is reciting the name of Amitabha Buddha, which is chanted in many different languages around the world. Included in this booklet are the text, pronunciation, and English translation for how Amitabha Buddha's name is chanted in the Chinese Buddhist tradition.

The Heart Sutra is a short sutra, commonly chanted individually or in groups, that contains the core teachings on *prajnaparamita,* or the "perfection of wisdom." The sutra is short, at only 260 Chinese characters. Included is an English translation of the sutra's meaning, followed by the Chinese characters and their pronunciation.

The Amitabha Sutra is commonly chanted in a group setting. An English translation of the sutra has been provided.

To help the reader locate the other texts mentioned in this booklet, an alphabetical list of the texts is included, along with their names in Chinese characters.

Reciting Amitabha Buddha's Name

I take refuge in		Amitabha			Buddha
南	無	阿	彌	陀	佛
Na	Mo	O	Mi	Tuo	Fo

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The Heart Sutra

(English Translation)

Avalokitesvara Bodhisattva, while contemplating deeply the *prajnaparamita,* realized the five aggregates are empty and was liberated from all suffering and hardship.

Sariputra, form is not different from emptiness; emptiness is not different from form. Form is emptiness. Emptiness is form. The same is true of feeling, perception, mental formations, and consciousness.

Sariputra, all phenomena are empty. They do not arise or cease, are not defiled or pure, and do not increase or decrease. Thus, in emptiness, there is no form, feeling, perception, mental formations, or consciousness.

No eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body, or mind; no form, sound, smell, taste, touch, or *dharmas*; no eye consciousness and so on unto mind consciousness; no ignorance and extinction of ignorance; even unto no aging and death and no extinction of aging and death; no suffering, cause of suffering, cessation, or path; no wisdom and no attainment.

As there is no attainment, bodhisattvas who rely on the prajnaparamita have neither worry nor obstruction. Without worry and obstruction, there is no

fear. Away from confusion and delusion, they will ultimately reach *nirvana.* All the Buddhas of the past, present, and future rely on the prajnaparamita to attain *anuttara-samyak-sambodhi.*

Thus, know that the prajnaparamita is the great profound mantra, is the illuminating mantra, is the most supreme of all mantras, is the unequalled mantra, able to eliminate all suffering, and is true and not false.

Thus, proclaim the *Prajnaparamita Mantra*, proclaim the mantra that says:

Gate gate paragate parasamgate bodhi svaha.

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般 若 波 羅 蜜 多
Bo Re Bo Luo Mi Duo

心 經
Xin Jing

觀 自 在 菩 薩， 行
Guan Zi Zai Pu Sa Xing

深 般 若 波 羅 蜜
Shen Bo Re Bo Luo Mi

多 時， 照 見 五 蘊
Duo Shi Zhao Jian Wu Yun

皆 空， 度 一 切 苦
Jie Kong Du Yi Qie Ku

厄。 舍 利 子， 色 不
E She Li Zi Se Bu

異 空， 空 不 異 色，
Yi Kong Kong Bu Yi Se

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色 即 是 空， 空 即
Se Ji Shi Kong Kong Ji

是 色， 受 想 行 識，
Shi Se Shou Xiang Xing Shi

亦 復 如 是。 舍 利
Yi Fu Ru Shi She Li

子， 是 諸 法 空 相，
Zi Shi Zhu Fa Kong Xiang

不 生 不 滅， 不 垢
Bu Sheng Bu Mie Bu Gou

不 淨， 不 增 不 減，
Bu Jing Bu Zeng Bu Jian

是 故 空 中 無 色，
Shi Gu Kong Zhong Wu Se

無 受 想 行 識， 無
Wu Shou Xiang Xing Shi Wu

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眼 耳 鼻 舌 身 意，
Yan Er Bi She Shen Yi

無 色 聲 香 味 觸
Wu Se Sheng Xiang Wei Chu

法， 無 眼 界， 乃 至
Fa Wu Yan Jie Nai Zhi

無 意 識 界， 無 無
Wu Yi Shi Jie Wu Wu

明， 亦 無 無 明 盡，
Ming Yi Wu Wu Ming Jin

乃 至 無 老 死， 亦
Nai Zhi Wu Lao Si Yi

無 老 死 盡， 無 苦
Wu Lao Si Jin Wu Ku

集 滅 道， 無 智 亦
Ji Mie Dao Wu Zhi Yi

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無 得。 以 無 所 得
Wu De Yi Wu Suo De

故， 菩 提 薩 埵， 依
Gu Pu Ti Sa Duo Yi

般 若 波 羅 蜜 多
Bo Re Bo Luo Mi Duo

故 心 無 罣 礙， 無
Gu Xin Wu Gua Ai Wu

罣 礙 故， 無 有 恐
Gua Ai Gu Wu You Kong

怖， 遠 離 顛 倒 夢
Bu Yuan Li Dian Dao Meng

想， 究 竟 涅 槃。 三
Xiang Jiu Jing Nie Pan San

世 諸 佛， 依 般 若
Shi Zhu Fo Yi Bo Re

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波 羅 蜜 多 故， 得
Bo Luo Mi Duo Gu De

阿 耨 多 羅 三 藐
A Nou Duo Luo San Miao

三 菩 提。 故 知 般
San Pu Ti Gu Zhi Bo

若 波 羅 蜜 多， 是
Re Bo Luo Mi Duo Shi

大 神 咒， 是 大 明
Da Shen Zhou Shi Da Ming

咒， 是 無 上 咒， 是
Zhou Shi Wu Shang Zhou Shi

無 等 等 咒， 能 除
Wu Deng Deng Zhou Neng Chu

一 切 苦， 真 實 不
Yi Qie Ku Zhen Shi Bu

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虛， 故 說 般 若 波
Xu Gu Shuo Bo Re Bo

羅 蜜 多 咒， 即 說
Luo Mi Duo Zhou Ji Shuo

咒 曰， 揭 諦， 揭 諦，
Zhou Yue Jie Di Jie Di

波 羅 揭 諦， 波 羅
Bo Luo Jie Di Bo Luo

僧 揭 諦， 菩 提 薩
Seng Jie Di Pu Ti Sa

婆 訶。
Po He

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The Amitabha Sutra as Discoursed by the Buddha

Thus have I heard: Once the Buddha was staying at Jetavana, Anathapindika's Park in the Kingdom of Sravasti with a great sangha of *bhiksus*, one thousand two hundred and fifty in all. All were great arhats who the multitudes knew and recognized, such as the elders Sariputra, Mahamaudgalyayana, Mahakasyapa, Mahakatyayana, Mahakausthila, Revata, Suddhipanthaka, Nanda, Ananda, Rahula, Gavampati, Pindola Bharadvaja, Kalodayin, Mahakapphina, Vakkula, Aniruddha and other great disciples like these. Also, the bodhisattvas, mahasattvas, Dharma Prince Manjusri, Ajita Bodhisattva, Gandhahastin Bodhisattva, Nityodyukta Bodhisattva, and other great bodhisattvas like these—as well as Sakra Devanam Indra and immeasurable other heavenly beings—were all in the great assembly.

At the time, the Buddha told the elder Sariputra, "West of here, passing beyond hundreds of thousands of millions of Buddhas' Lands, there is a world called 'Ultimate Bliss.' In that land there is a Buddha named Amitabha who has now manifested there to teach the Dharma.

"Sariputra, why is that land called 'Ultimate Bliss'? The sentient beings in that land are without any kind of suffering, and only enjoy various kinds of happiness, therefore it is called Ultimate Bliss.

"Furthermore, Sariputra, completely circling the Land of Ultimate Bliss are seven tiers of railings, seven layers of netting, and seven rows of trees, which are all made of the four treasures. For this reason, that land is called Ultimate Bliss.

"Furthermore, Sariputra, in the Land of Ultimate Bliss there are ponds of seven treasures that are filled with the water of eight virtues, and the ground on the bottom of the ponds is covered solely by gold sand. On the four sides there are stairways composed of gold, silver, lapis lazuli, and crystal. Above, there are towered pavilions that have gold, silver, lapis lazuli, crystal, nacre, red pearls, and carnelian magnificently adorning them.

"In the ponds there are lotus flowers as large as carriage wheels that are blue colored with a blue sheen, yellow colored with a yellow sheen, red colored with a red sheen, and white colored with a white sheen. They are fine, wondrous, fragrant, and pure. Sariputra, the Land of Ultimate Bliss is complete with virtues and adornments like these.

"Furthermore, Sariputra, in that Buddha land heavenly music constantly plays, and the ground is made of gold. Throughout the six periods of day and

night, heavenly mandarava flowers rain down. Early in the morning, the sentient beings in that land always fill the hem of their robes with many wondrous flowers and make offerings to the hundreds of thousands of millions of Buddhas in the other directions, and return by mealtime to eat their food and walk in meditation. Sariputra, the Land of Ultimate Bliss is complete with virtues and adornments like these.

"Moreover, Sariputra, in that land there are always various kinds of rare multicolored birds, such as snow cranes, peacocks, parrots, saris, kalavinkas, and birds that are conjoined. Throughout the six periods of day and night, all of these birds sing in harmony and with elegant sound. These sounds proclaim the five faculties, the five strengths, the seven factors of awakening, the Noble Eightfold Path, and other teachings like these. After hearing these sounds, all the sentient beings in that land are fully mindful of the Buddha, the Dharma, and the Sangha.

"Sariputra, you should not say that these birds are actually born because of the karmic effects of past offenses. Why is this? Because that Buddha land is without the three lower realms. Sariputra, that Buddha land does not even have the names of the three lower realms, so how could they exist? All of these birds are transformationally produced through Amitabha Buddha's intention to cause the sounds of the Dharma to be widely circulated. Sariputra, when

gentle breezes blow in that Buddha land, all of the rows of jeweled trees and jeweled nets let out a subtle, wondrous sound similar to hundreds of thousands of types of music playing simultaneously. Those who hear the sounds will spontaneously give rise to a mind that is mindful of the Buddha, the Dharma, and the Sangha. Sariputra, that Buddha land is complete with virtues and adornments like these.

"Sariputra, what do you think? Why is that Buddha named Amitabha?

"Sariputra, that Buddha's brilliant radiance is immeasurable and illuminates the lands of the ten directions without any obstruction, therefore he is named Amitabha.

"Furthermore, Sariputra, the lifespan of that Buddha and his people lasts for immeasurable, infinite *asamkhya kalpas*. Therefore, he is called Amitabha.

"Sariputra, it has been ten *kalpas* since Amitabha Buddha attained Buddhahood.

"Furthermore, Sariputra, that Buddha has immeasurable, infinite *sravaka* disciples, who are all arhats and whose numbers cannot be known by calculation. All of the bodhisattvas are also like this. Sariputra, that Buddha land is complete with virtues and adornments like these.

"Furthermore, Sariputra, the sentient beings who are born in the Land of Ultimate Bliss are all *avaivartikas,* and among them there are many who

will become Buddhas in one more rebirth. Their numbers are extremely vast, and cannon be known by calculation. One could only speak of them in terms of immeasurable, infinite asamkhyas.

"Sariputra, sentient beings who hear this should set forth a vow to be reborn in that land. Why is this? Because they will be able to meet with all of the utmost virtuous people like these in a single place.

"Sariputra, it is not possible to obtain rebirth in that land with few wholesome roots or meritorious causes and conditions. Sariputra, if good men and women hear Amitabha Buddha mentioned and hold firmly to his name for one day, two days, three, four, five, six or seven days, wholeheartedly without distraction, then when these people are near the end of life, Amitabha Buddha will appear in front of them with a host of sages.

"In their final moments, if the minds of these people are not distorted, then they will able to be reborn in Amitabha's Land of Ultimate Bliss.

"Sariputra, I recognize these benefits; therefore I proclaim these words: 'If there are sentient beings who hear this spoken, they should set forth a vow to be born in that land.'

"Sariputra, similar to me now, there are also those in the eastern region who praise the inconceivable virtues of Amitabha Buddha, such as Aksobya

Buddha, Sumeru Emblem Buddha, Great Sumeru Buddha, Sumeru Light Buddha, Wondrous Voice Buddha, and other Buddhas like these who are as numerous as grains of sand in the Ganges River. From their own lands, they each extend their characteristic long, broad tongues covering everywhere in the three thousandfold world systems and speak these sincere and true words: 'Sentient beings, you should believe in the *Praising the Inconceivable Virtues Which All Buddhas Have Protected Sutra*.'

"Sariputra, in the southern region there is Sun Moon Beacon Buddha, Renowned Light Buddha, Great Blazing Shoulders Buddha, Sumeru Beacon Buddha, Immeasurable Diligence Buddha, and other Buddhas like these who are as numerous as grains of sand in the Ganges River. From their own lands, they each extend their characteristic long, broad tongues covering everywhere in the three thousandfold world systems and speak these sincere and true words: 'Sentient beings, you should believe in the *Praising the Inconceivable Virtues Which All Buddhas Have Protected Sutra*.'

"Sariputra, in the western region there is Immeasurable Life Buddha, Immeasurable Emblem Buddha, Immeasurable Banner Buddha, Great Light Buddha, Great Brilliance Buddha, Treasure Emblem Buddha, Pure Light Buddha, and other Buddhas like these who are as numerous as grains of sand in

the Ganges River. From their own lands, they each extend their characteristic long, broad tongues covering everywhere in the three thousandfold world systems and speak these sincere and true words: 'Sentient beings, you should believe in the *Praising the Inconceivable Virtues Which All Buddhas Have Protected Sutra*.'

"Sariputra, in the northern region there is Blazing Shoulders Buddha, Most Excellent Voice Buddha, Unstoppable Buddha, Sun Birth Buddha, Net Brilliance Buddha, and other Buddhas like these who are as numerous as grains of sand in the Ganges River. From their own lands, they each extend their characteristic long, broad tongues covering everywhere in the three thousandfold world systems and speak these sincere and true words: 'Sentient beings, you should believe in the *Praising the Inconceivable Virtues Which All Buddhas Have Protected Sutra*.'

"Sariputra, in the lower region there is Lion Buddha, Renowned Buddha, Acclaimed Light Buddha, Dharma Buddha, Dharma Banner Buddha, Upholding the Dharma Buddha, and other Buddhas like these who are as numerous as grains of sand in the Ganges River. From their own lands, they each extend their characteristic long, broad tongues covering everywhere in the three thousandfold world systems and speak these sincere and true words:

'Sentient beings, you should believe in the *Praising the Inconceivable Virtues Which All Buddhas Have Protected Sutra.'*

"Sariputra, in the upper region there is Brahma Voice Buddha, Constellation King Buddha, Foremost Fragrance Buddha, Fragrance and Light Buddha, Great Blazing Shoulders Buddha, Multicolored Jeweled Flower Adornment Body Buddha, King of the Sala Tree Buddha, Jeweled Flower Virtue Buddha, Discerning All Meanings Buddha, Sumeru-Like Buddha, and other Buddhas like these who are as numerous as grains of sand in the Ganges River. From their own lands, they each extend their characteristic long, broad tongues covering everywhere in the three thousandfold world systems and speak these sincere and true words: 'Sentient beings, you should believe in the *Praising the Inconceivable Virtues Which All Buddhas Have Protected Sutra*.'

"Sariputra, what do you think? Why is it called the *Praising the Inconceivable Virtues Which All Buddhas Have Protected Sutra*?

"Sariputra, if there are those good men and women who hear this sutra and receive and retain it, and hear the name of all the Buddhas, then all of these good men and women are protected and kept in mind by all Buddhas. All of them will attain non-regression from anuttara-samyak-sambodhi.

For this reason, Sariputra, all of you should believe and receive my words, and those of all Buddhas.

"Sariputra, if there are those who have already put forth a vow, or who are presently setting forth a vow, or who will set forth a vow wanting to be reborn in the Land of Amitabha Buddha, then all of these people will attain non-regression from anuttara-samyak-sambodhi, whether they are already born, presently being born, or will be born in that land. For this reason, Sariputra, if there are those good men and women who believe, they should set forth a vow to be reborn in that land.

"Sariputra, just as I now praise the inconceivable virtues of all Buddhas, those Buddhas also commend my inconceivable virtues, proclaiming these words: 'Sakyamuni Buddha is able to accomplish extremely difficult and rare feats. In the Saha land amid the evil period of five degenerations—kalpa degeneration, view degeneration, affliction degeneration, sentient being degeneration, and lifespan degeneration—he is able to attain anuttara-samyak-sambodhi. For the sake of all sentient beings, he teaches this Dharma that this world finds hard to believe.'

"Sariputra, you should know, I have practiced these difficult feats during the evil period of five degenerations, attaining anuttara-samyak-sambodhi, and have taught this Dharma that the world finds hard to believe. This is extremely difficult."

After the Buddha spoke this sutra, Sariputra and all of the *bhiksus*, and heavenly beings, humans, and *asuras* of all the worldly realms heard what the Buddha said, rejoiced in it, and faithfully accepted it. They made obeisance and then departed.

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List of Texts

The Amitabha Sutra
Omituo Jing 阿彌陀經

The Diamond Sutra
Jingang Jing 金剛經

The Eight Realizations of a Bodhisattva Sutra
Ba Daren Jue Jing 八大人覺經

The Flower Adornment Sutra
Huayan Jing 華嚴經

The Great Compassion Dharani
Dabei Zhou 大悲咒

The Heart Sutra
Bore Boluomiduo Xin Jing 般若波羅蜜多心經

The Lotus Sutra
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The Ten Short Mantras
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Puxian Shi Dayuan 普賢十大願

"The Universal Gate Chapter" of *The Lotus Sutra*
Pumen Pin 普門品

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