



**THE EIGHTEENTH  
ASPIRATIONAL VOW OF  
BUDDHA AMITABHA**

**BHIKKHU THICH TUE HAI**

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*His Eminence D. K. Garchen Rinpoche*

། མེ་ཉི་ནམ་ཡོང་ཉང་ ( Long Huong ) དགོན་པའི་མཁན་པོ་ཐིག་ཉི་ཉེ་ ( Thich Tue Hai )  
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**FOREWORD BY H.E. GARCHEN TRIPTUL RINPOCHE**

*In Search of the Correct Address of the Western Pure Land of Great Bliss and Dharmakaya Amitabha* is a book written by Venerable Thich Tue Hai, the Abbot of Long Huong Monastery in Vietnam. Consisting of two sections, the content includes how we should understand that the so-called Amitabha (Buddha of Limitless Light) is one's nature of mind which is one's luminosity that has permanently exhausted the causes or the ten faults of suffering. We should not only think that Amitabha simply comes from some pure land to save us from suffering. Having translated the book from Vietnamese to English, Milam Sudhana also aspires to print the books for distribution. I rejoice in her extensive intention to benefit all. I also pray that many people will get to read this book.

*[Love and Compassion]*

*Signature*

Gar Konchog Gyaltzen

**FOREWORD BY KHENCHEN KONCHOG GYALTSEN**

I am delighted to see the new book, *“In Search of the Correct Address of the Western Pureland of Ultimate Bliss and Dharmakaya Amitabha,”* by Bhikkhu Thich Tue Hai. Buddha Amitabha and the Western Pureland are popular topics in the world of engaged Buddhism, yet I believe the author is the first among his contemporaries to discover its “correct address,” and is able to explain it through the eyes of Right Dharma. So I welcome this precious book for readers, and I have no doubt that it will bring benefit to many Dharma practitioners.

Many Mahayana and Vajrayana practitioners follow the tradition of the Western Pureland of Buddha Amitabha, and they practice sincerely. Some practitioners literally believe that the Western Pureland is somewhere in the “west,” and if they say prayers and recite the Amitabha mantra single-mindedly, they will be reborn there. This gives them great comfort and can benefit many beginners, but this concept is very limited. Here, the

author explains that there are actually different levels of interpretation regarding the Amitabha practice. First of all, the “west” represents a pure and peaceful state of the mind where all ten fetters or ten root causes of suffering have ceased just as the sun has set in the west. Moreover, the ultimate bliss nature of Buddha Amitabha, as carefully and beautifully explained by the author, is none other than Dharmakaya, the highest state of realization. Bhikkhu Thich Tue Hai helps us understand that the Western Pureland has no physical location and no designated cardinal direction. Ultimately, the Western Pureland is within our own mind from which we can attain Buddhahood. Amitabha is all-pervasive!

I pray that all readers will gain much benefit and wisdom from Bhikkhu Thich Hue Hai’s new book and compelling presentation.



Khenchen Konchog Gyaltsen

*November 2, 2018*

*Escondido, California*

## I. INTRODUCTION

In a far distant past, Buddha Lohesvararaja appeared in the world, and in front of this Buddha, a fully-ordained monk named Dharmakara made forty-eight aspirational vows. These vows were attested by the Buddha himself who proclaimed that Dharmakara would become a Buddha named Amitabha in the Western Pureland of Ultimate Bliss. Dharmakara's Eighteenth Aspirational Vow is as follows:

*“If, when I attain Buddhahood, sentient beings in the lands of the ten directions – who sincerely and joyfully entrust themselves to me, desire to be born in my land, and recite my name even ten times – should not be born there, then may I not attain Perfect Enlightenment. Excluded, however, are those who commit the five heinous offences and abuse the Right Dharma.”*

It was based on this aspirational vow that sentient beings in the ten directions, especially those in endless cyclic existence, have the wish to be born in the Western



Pureland of Ultimate Bliss (Skt.: *Sukhavati*). It is because the Buddha described this Western Pureland as a beautiful place that is adorned with gold, silver, lapis lazuli, amber, coral, agate, and emerald – a land of seven exquisite substances, with tiers of railings made of precious jewels, water as pristinely clear as crystal, where all sounds produced by the gentle breezes, the flowing streams, and the enchanted birds proclaim the blissful sounds of Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha. It is a land where only sublime virtuous beings reside – a land that is without a single negative aspect and where even the word “suffering” does not exist.

Such a land is beautiful, pure, and majestic. When I hear of such a land, I also want to go there. I think that every one of us in this assembly also wants to go there. Indeed, I aspire that all of us will arrive there!

Before we can reach the Realm of Ultimate Bliss, we must clearly know the address. The important point is that we must know the *correct address* and thus, we will make it there. Otherwise, if we do not know the exact

address, then our path would be distorted and then we will never reach the Western Pureland of Ultimate Bliss. Thus, when we study the Dharma, we really must study it thoroughly [as it does not suffice to remain superficial].

Among the Buddha's Sutras, there are words that are obscured (figurative) and those that are plain (literal). Literal words are transparent and direct, whereas the Mahayana Sutras mostly consist of reasoning and literature that have an allegorical nature and [may] not [exist] in reality. The Mahayana Sutras represent the symbolic aspect, rather than the actuality. A case in point is how the Buddha taught that this world in and of itself is suffering which is composed of [the experiences of] birth, old age, sickness, and death. Those words express the truth [of life], and if we can understand its meaning according to [its expression], then it will be just fine. However, if we were to "*take the words of the Mahayana Sutras at face value*" in each and every circumstance, it would be an injustice to the Buddhas of the three times.

For example, when the Buddha was expounding

the Dharma in the *Lotus Sutra*, it is said that the Buddha emitted a ray of light from the tuft of white hair between his eyebrows, and that this light radiated up as high as the Akanistha Heaven and down as far as the lowest hell, Avici. In between, there were countless worlds of sentient beings. There were worlds in which the Bodhisattva Mahasattvas were seen practicing the Bodhisattva path, becoming Buddhas, teaching others, and leaving sacred relics behind after entering *parinirvana*. Then there were worlds in which some people had already generated Bodhicitta, other people were just entering the Bodhisattva path, some had attained Arhatship, and beginners merely aspired to follow the path. When we hear of something like that, how should we understand its meaning [symbolically or literally]? Did the Buddha emit light from the white tuft in order to see all sentient beings? If we have such a [literal] understanding then that would be an injustice to the Buddhas of the three times.

Let us look at another example. In the *Diamond Sutra*, Subhuti asked the Buddha, “*If a good man, or good*

woman, resolves his mind on anuttara-samyaksambodhi (Unsurpassed, Proper, Equanimous, and Right Enlightenment), how should he dwell, how should he subdue his mind?” To which the Buddha replied that “He should not develop a mind which dwells upon sights, sounds, smells, tastes, sensory sensations or phenomena; he should develop a mind which does not dwell on anything.” [The Buddha also said that] “the unfathomable, infinite number of living beings have all been liberated, taken across to extinction, yet, there is not even a single being, in truth, has actually been taken across.” In this Sutra, the Buddha explained that there are nine types of sentient beings: those that are born from eggs, born from wombs, born from moisture, born by transformation, born with form, born without form, born with thought, born without thought, and born not totally with, nor totally without, thought.

Beings born from wombs take birth from the womb and their forms appear instantly the moment they enter the womb. Just like human beings, they appear with

form the moment they take birth. Then, there are those mammals like pigs, cows, dogs, etc. which also appear with form instantly the moment they enter the womb. Then there are those born from eggs like birds, fish, chickens, etc. Again, the Buddha said that, *“although I take countless and limitless living beings across to extinction, in reality there are no living beings taken across.”*

On the other hand, Kistigarbha, the Earth Store Bodhisattva also made an aspirational vow that said, *“Until the day the hell realm is emptied, I vow not to become a Buddha,”* which means that he will not enter Buddhahood if the hell realm is still not completely emptied; if there is any living being that still crosses the cycle of life and death, the Earth Store Bodhisattva vowed not to attain the highest, Perfect Enlightenment. Actually, not only Kistigarbha made such a vow [to liberate all sentieng beings from *samsara*] but all Buddhas have but a single vow. One might think, “But the Buddha attained enlightenment over two thousand years ago, yet all of us

are still here, left behind and seemingly neglected. Pigs, dogs, cows, horses, and birds still fill this world. The Buddha has not yet delivered a single animal to Buddhahood, yet he already attained Buddhahood himself, so then how should we understand this whole concept [of not entering Perfect Enlightenment when the samsaric world is not yet emptied]? Therefore, are the words of the Buddha correct or erroneous [in this aspect]?” Does taking across all living beings to Buddhahood mean to take across to extinction the outer sentient beings or to take across to extinction *those living beings inside our mind*? Our discussion has been long-winded, but it is to lead us to the Eighteenth Aspirational Vow [of Buddha Amitabha]. Therefore, when we read the Mahayana Sutras, we cannot interpret the meaning according to the exact wordings. If we try do so, we may misinterpret the Buddha’s intention. And if we practice according [to a distorted understanding], we will stray from the proper path of the Right Dharma. Our practice will not bear the result that we expect.

## II. IN SEARCH OF THE CORRECT ADDRESS OF THE WESTERN PURELAND OF ULTIMATE BLISS

*“When I attain Buddhahood, if sentient beings in the ten directions – who sincerely and joyfully entrust themselves to me, desire to be born in my land, and recite my name, even ten times – should not be born there, then may I not attain Perfect Enlightenment.”*

Now, let us try to understand the deliverance vow of Buddha Amitabha one more time: *“When I attain Buddhahood”* means when the Buddha already became a Buddha. *“Sentient beings in the ten directions”* means all living beings residing in the ten-directional *dharmadatu*. *“Who sincerely and joyfully entrust themselves to me”* means [these sentieng beings] deeply and sincerely have faith in Buddha Amitabha; they have admirational devotion and love toward Buddha Amitabha. *“If [sentient beings] who desire to be born in my land, and recite my name, even ten times, should not be born there, then may I not attain Perfect Enlightenment.”* If you want to reach

his Western Pureland of Ultimate Bliss, then you need to bring to mind the Buddha at least ten times, and if you still cannot arrive at his pure realm, then Buddha Amitabha vowed not to attain Buddhhood and not to sit on the throne of Perfect Enlightenment. This is such a perfectly correct sentence! Excluded, however, are those who commit the five heinous offences and abuse the Right Dharma, the rest of the living beings who bring to mind the Buddha will all reach the Buddhaland

When I read the *Amitabha Sutra* up to this specific vow, I developed deep admiration and devotion, and resolved to practice in order to take rebirth in the Western Pureland of Ultimate Bliss. Today, we will discuss about the address of the Western Pureland of Ultimate Bliss. From more than 2,500 years ago until this very day, [the location of] the Western Pureland of Ultimate Bliss has always been fixed; it has never moved.

The Buddha clearly mentioned the following in the *Shorter Sukhavativyuha Sutra of Amitabha*: “*The Buddha told the Chief Monk Sariputra that from here, going to the*



*west past one hundred thousand koti Buddha lands, there is a world realm called Sukhavati. In this land there is a Buddha called Amitabha who is presently expounding the Dharma.”*

Right here in this sentence, the Buddha introduced the **address of the Western Pureland of Ultimate Bliss** to us. We must read and analyze it very carefully to find out where exactly is the Western Pureland and how to arrive there.

We should first try to open our eyes widely to imagine a round globe in the midst of space, and let us imagine that we are standing on it. From the perspective of where we are standing, the sun rises in the east and sets in the west. We are currently searching for an address, so we need to draw up a diagram to determine exactly where the west is in relative to ourselves.

When we wake up and see the crack of dawn, we think the sun is actually rising based on our ordinary perception. However, someone with a scientific understanding will see it in a very different light and will not

think that the sun is actually rising in the morning. They would understand that our Mother Earth is rotating toward the sun. Thus, we are at a place where there is no sun and we slowly rotate toward the direction of the sun. When our Mother Earth rotates past the sun, it becomes dusk, and we believe that the sun has set. And [based on that], we confirm that the direction where the sun rises is the east, and the direction where the sun sets is the west according to the mundane way of seeing things in our human world. Yet, in reality, the sun neither rises nor sets.

According to the view of the Sutras, the east and the west of a Buddhaland take on different meanings and it is not the same as the above-mentioned [worldly] view. The east is the direction of sunrise, which is the beginning of all [mental and physical] movements and it is the start of all activities in a day. For those beings who have not yet walked on the path of liberation according to the Buddha-Dharma and who are still engrossed in the [activities of the] three worlds, then the eastern direction is the direction that initiates all [phenomenality] of the

cyclic existence of birth and death.

When the sun sets in the western direction, it has to do with the end of all movements, bringing all [mental and physical] activities of the day to a stop. According to the view of the Sutras, this refers to the end of confusion and darkness, leading all life-and-death fluctuations generated in our minds to cease. We can simply understand east represents the beginning and west represents the end of [the continuity] in our mindstreams, bringing all fluctuations in each of our thought movement to a halt. However, if we base everything on the direction of the sunset, then we will continue to walk without end, and we definitely will never be able to reach the Western Pureland of Ultimate Bliss.

“... [F]rom here, going to the west past one hundred thousand *koti* lands, there is a world realm called *Sukhavati*.” Herein, the Buddha was referring to what all of us need to do in order to arrive at the Western Realm of Ultimate Bliss. We need to cross beyond the one hundred thousand *koti* Buddha lands. [*Koti* is a Sanskrit word

meaning ten million]. One hundred thousand *koti* lands [metaphorically] indicate an extremely large number that we could not possibly count with our [ordinary] heads. So, where exactly are all this one hundred thousand of myriad *koti* lands?

Now, let us take a look at what is meant by “all sentient beings” as expounded in the *Diamond Sutra* in order to gain a clear understanding [of the so-called innumerable *koti* lands]. The Buddha said that **sentient beings are actually born of our own mindstream**. Here, we will only discuss two types of sentient: those born from eggs and those born from wombs.

What does it mean *those born from eggs that are from our mindstream*? No, they are not [literally] chickens or ducks that lay eggs and brood on a nest for a while until their eggs hatch into little chicks or ducklings. They are actually **our very own “sentient-being” mind**. For example, as we are sitting here listening to the teaching, we try to listen so we can later ask question, but the teaching has not finished, so we cannot yet ask the ques-

tion. This means that those egg-born sentient beings were taken birth but the eggs have not yet hatched into chicklings. Or, for example, we are sitting here, and we only eat vegetarian food once in a while, thus we become hungry very quickly. We come up with the thought that later on, we will stop by the market and eat something to fill our stomachs. However, due to the fact that we are still sitting here and have not actually eaten anything yet, they are only mental sentient beings that we think of in our heads. Then in the evening when we actually stop by the market to eat, that is when the “eggs” hatch and become little chicks – that is the beginning of all actions. Thus, we call these *“the sentient beings born from eggs within the mind-consciousness.”*

And what, then, are the sentient beings born from the wombs? For example, we feel itchy somewhere behind our back and we immediately reach out to scratch it. The moment we generate the mind or the intention, it instantaneously becomes an action. Or we might think of a sentence, and we say it out loud or write it down at the

very moment the thought arises in our mind. The very moment those “sentient beings” are born, they become speech or actions. They are considered sentient beings born from the wombs. The Buddha then said: *“I must cause them to enter nirvana without residue, and thus, they can be taken across to extinction. Although I take countless and limitless sentient beings across to extinction, in truth, there are actually not a single sentient being taken across.”* Only when we do it the way [the Buddha explained] will we be able to abide and subdue our mind to reach the Unsurpassed, Proper, Equanimous, and Perfect Enlightenment. Thus, we can understand that the Buddha was not talking about taking across a [literal] dog, chicken, or bird. It is not at all like that. The Buddha was talking about the **“sentient-being” within our own mind.**

### **1. Ten fetters or ten root causes of suffering**

In the Amitabha Sutra, when the Buddha talked about *“going to the west past ten trillion lands,”* we immediately imagine the west as being in a certain direction.

However, to imagine [of the west direction] in such a way is incorrect. As previously mentioned, directions are not defined in terms of “here is the east,” and “there is the west” like we normally think. We must understand that here “west” refers to the stoppage or cessation of all mental activities. The Buddha was actually talking about the **land of our own mind**. If we are able to completely end the ten fetters or ten root causes of suffering, then our mind will be in perfect happiness, and peaceful and serene. That is also called *nirvana*. In other words, we must bring all ten fetters to an end, and then we would arrive at the Western Pureland of Ultimate Bliss.

Ten fetters leading to suffering include: attachment, anger, ignorance, arrogance, doubt, belief in a self, extreme view, grasping at one’s own views, grasping at vows, and wrong view. In the Amitabha Sutra, the Buddha said that we must cross beyond one hundred thousand *koti* Buddha lands, and it means we need to move past the ten fetters of suffering in order to come home to the Western Pureland of Ultimate Bliss.

**One hundred thousand *koti* lands of desire:** For example, this morning we went out on the street and noticed that our next door neighbor has built a big and beautiful tile-roofed villa whereas our own house looked so diminutive; thus, we did not feel so pleasant about it. Or maybe we saw a friend who always dressed up in beautiful, fashionable, color-coordinated clothing, with expensive shoes and a trendy hairdo that suited her oval facial feature. Thus, we began to generate a thought or a desire wishing for those things, and thereafter, this desire continued to remain in our heart-mind for a long chain of time. And thus, one hundred thousand *koti* lands of desire have actually manifested in us.

**One hundred thousand *koti* lands of anger:** Then there are so many things that bring us dissatisfaction. For example, our sangha organized a bus tour to Long Huong Temple to listen to a Dharma teaching. Yesterday, [the tour leader] said he would collect fifty thousand *dong* per person, yet today, he raised it to fifty-one thousand *dong*. When he was collecting the money, he promised that he



would let you sit in the front row, but today he squeezed you all the way in the back of the bus. All of this dissatisfaction made you feel irritated, resentful and angry, and it lead you to give rise to troubling thoughts. There are so many things that can make us feel uncomfortable or cause us to have angry thoughts from one day to the next. So this is called one hundred thousand *koti* lands of **anger**.

**One hundred thousand *koti* lands of ignorance:**

When we come face to face with something in this life, we never get to know its ultimate reality as it truly is. For example, when our eyes meet with an object, we become dualistic, and thus, we do not see all the way through to its ultimate reality. When our ears hear sounds and we become dualistic, then we hear dark sounds, we hear distortion, we hear gossiping; and thus, we cannot see, hear or understand all the way through to its ultimate reality. We uninterruptedly see things. We see something each and every moment. We hear something each and every moment. Yet, we cannot penetrate the veil of ignorance

through our seeing and hearing based on our six senses. It is because we see everything based on our dualistic inclinations, on right or wrong, proper or improper, good or bad, win or lose, etc. When we again and again see and hear in a state of confusion and ignorance from day to day, then that, indeed, is one hundred thousand *koti* lands of **ignorance**.

**One hundred thousand *koti* lands of arrogance:**

We also believe we are superior to others. We may think, “It does not matter what people say, he is not as good as I. I am a much better practitioner than he.” We implicitly develop this kind of perception. Oftentimes perception arises when we see someone accomplishing something important while we ourselves have not, and we would say, “It is only because there were enough conditions for it to happen. Just wait until I have a chance myself, I would do a much better job.” That prideful mind does not allow us to see anyone as equal to, or better than, ourselves. It only allows us to be “number one” and the center of the universe. Even though we do not practice so very well, we

still call ourselves “saints” and “gods” so that others will venerate and admire us. This is actually the great self-arrogance. Pride, self-arrogance, and pretense of virtues all fall under arrogance. People may be a million times superior to us, but we will say “he is only just a bit better than I. Given a chance to do it, I would surpass him.” The thoughts of self-arrogance are born in our mindstream from this moment to the next, and that is called one hundred thousand *koti* lands of **arrogance**.

**One hundred thousand *koti* lands of doubt:** When we read a book, we cannot understand the profound teachings of the Mahayana Sutras due to our feeble capabilities. Immediately doubts arise. We become doubtful of the Dharma and of ourselves. According to the Zen tradition, everyone has the capability to become a Buddha and has the ability to attain realization. When we hear something like that, we develop doubt, thinking that the masters must already have had a great level of capabilities and great roots of virtue, and thus, they attained realization, whereas we are not at all certain and feel we do

not have the same abilities. We have doubts about ourselves, about the Dharma, and about everything else, too. Even when someone is asking us to start a business together, we do not know whether this is real or not, or whether they are trying to lure us into something to rob us of our money. Whatever we face in this life, we develop feelings of ambiguity; we cannot trust, we cannot believe, and we cannot become decisive. We cannot see anything deeply through to its reality. That is one hundred thousand *koti* lands of **doubt**.

**One hundred thousand *koti* lands of belief in a self.** Next, we perceive that we are real. We would think regardless of what [the Dharma] says, if someone strikes my body, it will suffer and it will hurt. It can also become sad, and it can get hungry and thirsty, and it needs sleep. It is so clear that up until the moment we pass from this life, we still hold our physical selves as something precious. We treasure and have concerns for our physical bodies. That is one hundred thousand *koti* lands of **belief in a self**.

**One hundred thousand *koti* lands of extreme views:** Furthermore, we perceive “here” and “there,” and “eternalism” and “nihilism.” If we believe that there is an “I” and there are “others,” then we fall into opposite and extreme views. We see this side is right and the other side is wrong, this side is proper and the other side is improper, and such a way of seeing things are extreme views.

Or when we see thoughts arising in our mind-stream, [we think] that since I am now a practitioner, I must eliminate them. Through my exertion in meditation practice, I must successfully destroy that one deluded thought, I must successfully destroy two deluded thoughts, I must eliminate them all and not allow my mind to develop any deluded thought. Such an analytical explanation belongs to the mistaken view of nihilism of non-Buddhists. Or we think that whatever exists will exist forever. For example, someone who was born as a human will remain a human throughout their lifetimes. After death, he will take birth again as a human, forever re-

mains a human and nothing will change over the course of space and time. That is the mistaken view of eternalism. [In general,] **an extreme view** is a view that believes in two opposites, and it falls either into eternalism or nihilism.

**One hundred thousand *koti* lands of grasping at one's own views:** Due to our distorted views and our experiential understanding of eliminating deluded thoughts, [we feel] that since we have practiced diligently for a long time throughout the years, we are able to calm our mind through single-pointed concentration for one hour during which no confused thoughts arise. Therefore, we believe that we are able to suppress our deluded thoughts. If someone tells us otherwise, we will debate with all our might. That is because we feel that we have successfully eliminated all thoughts, so we grasp at this [way of practice as] being correct. Clinging to our own view is considered one hundred thousand *koti* lands of **grasping at one's own views.**

**One hundred thousand *koti* lands of grasping at**

**vows:** After we receive vows, we resolve at keeping these vows very strictly and would not transgress even at the slightest. In Buddhism, keeping vows is correct in accordance with the Right Dharma. There is nothing wrong with keeping vows, however, we cling and grasp [at the vows], and are conservative of the ceremonial vows and of the discipline. [Unfortunately,] there are vows that the Buddha could elucidate, yet we cannot. For example, consider the vow prohibiting lying or false speech. Suppose that during wartime, some soldiers chasing after an offender across your house and they ask you whether you have seen him. If you respond that you saw him running across and is hiding in that bush over there, so that the soldiers will find him and kill him, then this is considered breaking or not breaking the vow on lying? Discipline sometimes means to keep the vows is to perfectly abide by the vows, and to transgress the vows is to break the discipline; yet, sometimes it also means to keep the vows is to transgress and to transgress is actually to perfectly keep the vows. There are cases when to keep is

to abide by the vows strictly. However, there are cases in which keeping a vow means you actually transgress. In this case, if we keep our vows at the cost of another person being caught and killed, then it is considered transgressing the vow.

Discipline is *shila* [in Sanskrit] and this can be interpreted as “becoming liberated by assurance” and “becoming liberated part by part,” so it means we can actually be assured of liberation by whichever vow we can keep. A vow is not a precept to admonish or to forbid us from something. There are times when keeping vows is correct, but there are times when we need to be flexible, skillful and adaptable in order not to harm others. To not harm others is keeping vows in a pure way. Yet, we usually clutch tightly [and we believe that] since the Buddha taught it that way, I must do it exactly that way. That person is hiding in that bush, so then I have to point him out. Keeping vows is not [necessary] like that.

Another example regards a Bhikkhu, a fully-ordained monk, who is walking on the street. There is a



vow taught by the Buddha that a Bhikkhu is not allowed to touch any part of a female's body, or to walk alone with a female on the same road. Now, if this Bhikkhu met a lady who just had an accident and is lying semi-conscious on the bare ground, and if this Bhikkhu does not come to her rescue by picking her up, she will most likely pass away afterward. Therefore, if this lady ends up losing her life due to the Bhikkhu keeping strict vows, then that is considered a transgression.

Another example is when non-Buddhists have very strange precepts that do not accord with the Right Dharma. For example, if you follow their religion, then you don't dare to read the scriptures of other religions. They have forbidding precepts and threatening omens that say if you take refuge in and are a follower of their religion, then you do not have the right to read the Buddhist scriptures. If so, then this is considered clutching at [misguided] discipline. That is falling under grasping at views and grasping at vows. There are precepts which we need to maintain, but in reality, it can be the same as to

transgress. That is one hundred *koti* lands of **grasping at vows**.

**One hundred thousand *koti* lands of wrong view:** Wrong view is the erroneous view we hold on to in this life. It means that we follow teachings, methods, and activities that are in conflict with the Right Dharma. For example, we might believe that there is a certain world realm in which a certain Buddha can liberate us and deliver us to his realm while we are still filled with torments. If we truly believe in such a teaching, then that is totally defaming the law of causality – cause and effect. Is that [kind of belief], then, considered right view or mistaken view? Any one of us who still holds on to such a belief is holding one hundred thousand *koti* lands of **wrong view**.

## **2. Methods to sever the ten root causes of suffering to arrive that the Western Pureland of Ultimate Bliss**

The above explanation refers to the ten root causes that lead us to suffering. They are “the truth of the origin of suffering” according to the Four Noble Truths. Here,

[in the *Amitabha Sutra*], the Buddha taught that if sentient beings can cross beyond hundreds of thousand *koti* lands to the west then they will reach the pure realm of Ultimate Bliss. What does this actually mean? It means that we have to relinquish and cross beyond the hundreds of thousand *koti* lands of desire, hundreds of thousand *koti* lands of anger, ignorance, arrogance, doubt, belief in a self, extreme views, grasping at one's own views, grasping at vows, and wrong view. Only then will we surely arrive at the Western Pureland.

The Buddha taught us very precisely in this one single sentence. It means that we must cross beyond the ten root causes of suffering and reach complete cessation in our own mindstream. It means we have to cease the realm of desire, the realm of anger, of ignorance, arrogance, doubt, belief in a self, extreme views, grasping at one's own views, grasping at vows and wrong view. There would be no more mental arising, and it is perfectly at rest when not even the slightest movement in our mindstream is present. Bringing cessation to all ten fetters we

will attain the state of *nirvana*, the truth of cessation, which is the third of the Four Noble Truths. But through what methods can we deliver all sentient-being minds to the realm of Ultimate Bliss to meet Buddha Amitabha face to face?

For example, when there is a thought arising in our mind, if we contemplate with insight on impermanence, suffering, emptiness, selflessness and illusion-like, then we can rest assured that such a thought will not end; it will return to take rebirth again. However, when a single thought of desire appears in our mind-stream, all we need to do is to simply and thoroughly know that it has just arisen, or to simply and thoroughly know that it is about ready to form, or that it is currently in operation, and that it is getting weaker until it subsides. All we do is to thoroughly and explicitly be aware of it as such.

If at that moment, however, we are still striving with effort, then that is not Buddha. Buddha does not need to practice with exertion. Buddha simply knows it, clearly and explicitly, without conceptualizing anything. There is

no exertion with any attempt, yet, there is nothing that can escape from the [wisdom] eyes of a Buddha. Whether we walk, stand, lie down or sit, and no matter how many miniscule thoughts are happening in our own mind-stream, we simply cognize with wisdom-awareness. There is simply nothing but the clear knowing-awareness, nothing more, nothing less, and as such, we would automatically reach the Western Pureland. Beings [in this land] would be edified by the Buddha, and that is why it is said that these beings would abide in the realm of the Buddha where Buddha sees, Buddha knows and Buddha blesses.

Thus, in every minute and every second, one would dwell in the realm of the Western Pureland of Ultimate Bliss. The Western Pureland becomes the realm in the presence in every step, every breath and every tempo of our life; the Western Pureland is not elsewhere. If we can recognize every miniscule, subtle thought with all-knowing wisdom-awareness, then whether walking, standing, sitting and lying down, we always remain in the

Western Pureland of Ultimate Bliss. We shall not think that we can only arrive there after we die. If at the present time, in every hour, every minute and every second we are living in repose, tranquility, and quiet serenity, and we are being brightly clear with plain knowingness, then we are actually living right in the realm of Ultimate Bliss in every hour, every minute and every second.

The Buddha did not call [this state of the mind] “*nirvana*,” but rather called it “Ultimate Bliss.” So that is simply a different term for “*nirvana*.”

Thus, it is obviously clear that if we want to arrive at the Western Pureland of Ultimate Bliss, we must cut through and bring all ten root causes of suffering to cessation. That is the most accurate address that the Buddha showed to us over two thousand five hundred years ago. I truly, truly like this specific part in the Sutra. Right here in the very beginning, this one sentence evidently expresses the essence and spirit of all traditions: the Basic Vehicle, Mahayana Buddhism, Zen Buddhism and Pureland Practice.

When a person already crosses beyond hundreds of thousand *koti* lands of the ten root causes of suffering, then he or she will joyfully abide in the state of *nirvana*, because such a place, when devoid of the seeds of suffering, can be called Ultimate Bliss. Ultimate Bliss is where the ten root causes of suffering completely cease. Outside of bringing the ten root causes of suffering to an end, there is no other place you can find Ultimate Bliss. There is not a single place that can have Ultimate Bliss other than bringing the ten fetters to an end.

We often say, “With aspiration and dedication, I supplicate that I may arrive at the Western Pureland of Ultimate Bliss.” This means we must pray and aspire to put all of our mind and efforts into bringing the root causes of suffering to cessation! If we do not put all our efforts into bringing the ten root causes of suffering to cessation, then there is no way that we can reach the Western Pureland of Ultimate Bliss, because we are heading toward the wrong address. For every day, every minute and every moment that we wish to reach the West-

ern Pureland of Ultimate Bliss, we must find ways to practice it that very day, during that every minute, and at that very moment to bring an end to all ten root causes of suffering. If any one of us ignores this request, yet goes around saying that one can reach the Western Pureland by doing something else, that is completely wrong. Cessation is and always has been the address for Ultimate Bliss. It has never moved. The Buddha never changed it or altered its position.

*“In the Western Pureland of Ultimate Bliss, Buddha Amitabha is presently expounding the Dharma.”* Amitabha is in the Sanskrit language; the literal English translation of his name is Limitless Longevity and Limitless Light; it is the boundless light that pervades all the realms in the ten directions. There is no place in the ten directions that this light does not touch. It is not ordinary light as it reaches through everywhere from the hidden caves to the narrow valleys, from the Akanistha Heaven to the Avici Hell. The extent of Limitless Longevity is immeasurable. We have read and studied the *Sutra of the*



*White Lotus on the Sublime Dharma (Lotus Sutra)*, other Mahayana Sutras, as well as Zen texts; thus, we understand what Limitless Life and Limitless Light are. Recently, the Venerable Master Jingkong translated “Buddha Amitabha” as follows: “A” is without or absent of, “Mita” is limit, and “Buddha” is awakening (*bodhi*), and so when we bring to mind and single-mindedly behold Amitabha, it means that we are actually holding and maintaining our own limitless wisdom-awareness and our own awakening.

When we pray and dedicate all merits to take birth in the Western Pureland of Ultimate Bliss, and when we generate the intention to practice in order to bring all ten root causes of suffering to an end, we supplicate Amitabha. To bring Buddha Amitabha to mind does not mean that we simply *think* about Amitabha, but rather is to actually *live* with Amitabha, with our own Limitless Awakening. Thus, when our eyes see, we are seeing Buddha Amitabha in the presence; when our ears hear, we are hearing Buddha Amitabha in the presence; when our noses smell, it is Buddha Amitabha in the presence; when

our tongues taste, it is Buddha Amitabha in the presence; when our bodies touch something, it is also Buddha Amitabha in the presence. Even when our mind meets an outer object, that, too, is Buddha Amitabha in the presence. It means our limitless awakening or limitless wisdom-awareness is present in our eyes, our ears, our noses! And it means that in each and every moment that we are living here in this world, we live in our own awakening and limitless wisdom-awareness. That is what we call “to bring to mind and to maintain Buddha Amitabha.” Whether we stand, walk, sit, lie down, stay awake, or sleep, we incessantly hold and maintain Buddha Amitabha in that way.

During the time when we bring to mind [the Buddha], if we are still feeling irritated, then at that moment, we have already forgotten [the Buddha]. To bring to mind and to maintain Amitabha does not mean that we staunchly recite Buddha Amitabha, Buddha Amitabha, Buddha Amitabha... but the most proper way is to never separate from Buddha Amitabha, and *that* is

even better than what is called “single-mindedness without distraction.” To diligently bring Buddha Amitabha to mind means to have Buddha Amitabha present in our six senses, to have Buddha Amitabha present in our own seeing, hearing, and knowing. To hear is awakening, to smell is awakening, to taste is awakening; there is not another thing that one needs to do except that. That in itself is called “to bring to mind and to maintain Buddha Amitabha.”

*“If [...] sentient beings in the lands of the ten directions – who sincerely and joyfully entrust themselves to me, desire to be born in my land, and recite my name even ten times – should not be born there, then may I not attain Perfect Enlightenment.”*

This is something which we could actually kneel down to pay homage to, because this sentence is so precise and so wondrous. Thus, in every instant, we aspire to take birth in the Western Pureland of Ultimate Bliss. This is the sincere devotion and sincere thirst to practice in all those followers of the Buddha-Dharma. Is there

anyone who is practicing who still wants to have anger and ignorance? Whether we are new, seasoned, deep, or shallow practitioners, we all want to relinquish our desire, anger, and ignorance. If one practices basic Theravadin Buddhism, one can also make an aspiration to arrive at the Western Pureland of Ultimate Bliss, because, in reality, when the Buddha taught about the Buddhafield of Ultimate Bliss, that is no other than the cessation of the ten root causes of suffering. The Western Pureland of Ultimate Bliss is just another name for *nirvana*. To me, the *Shorter Sukhavativyuha Sutra of Amitabha* is a Sutra in which the Buddha also interpreted the teachings of the Four Noble Truths in an amazing way.

### **3. Qualifications to reach the Western Pureland of Ultimate Bliss**

There is a paragraph in the *Shorter Sukhavativyuha Sutra of Amitabha* that the Buddha taught about the qualifications to take birth in the Western Pureland of Ultimate Bliss: “*Sariputra, if there is a virtuous man or virtuous woman who brings Buddha Amitabha to mind and recites*

*'Buddha Amitabha,' holding and maintaining his name for one, two, three, four, five, six, or seven days single-mindedly without distraction, then at the end of his or her life, Buddha Amitabha will appear with the multitude of Holy beings right in front of him or her in the presence. If at the time of death someone has a mind free of deluded confusion, he will be born in the land of Ultimate Bliss of Buddha Amitabha.*" Thus, those virtuous men and women will instantly take birth in the Western Pureland of Ultimate Bliss. This sentence is actually very much Zen-like. A Zen practitioner should put it on the shrine table to worship and to pay homage to rather than disregarding it.

The Buddha said, *"Sariputra, those with few good roots of virtue and causes of merit may not attain birth in this land."* How great our own virtuous roots and merits are, so that we might reach this Buddhafield? If we truly want to arrive there, our virtuous roots and merits cannot be small.

The Buddha also showed us another qualification and that is *"holding and maintaining his name for one,*

*two, three, four, five, six, or seven days single-mindedly without distraction, Buddha Amitabha will appear with the multitude of Holy beings right in front of him or her in the presence.”* To die does not necessarily mean to leave our life in an ordinary way, just like countless of billions of people who have died in the past. Here, to die is actually to let the five aggregates (*skandhas*) cease. When we pass away at the end of life, only our form aggregate ceases to exist, but the other four aggregates – feeling, thought, mental formation, and consciousness – remain intact. If everything else [other than the form aggregate] is still intact, then that means we have not yet died and we are only exchanging the physical form. Thinking in terms of literal death is a mistaken understanding of the language. In reality, when the form aggregate ceases, the other four aggregates are just going through changes; they don't truly die. However, when the Buddha said one “dies,” one really dies, and it means that one should let the four aggregates of feeling, thought, mental formation, and consciousness cease. In other words, to let all five

aggregates cease. In the *Heart Sutra*, it says, “Clearly perceive the empty nature of the five *skandhas*, and transcend all suffering.”

When we devoted practitioners bring Buddha Amitabha to mind and single-mindedly recite his name for one day, two days, three days, four days, five days, six days, and seven days without distraction, it means that we definitely would die. It means to let the form aggregate cease; however, at the moment we prepare for the actual death of the body composed of five aggregates, “*Buddha Amitabha will appear with the assembly of Holy beings right in front of us in the presence.*” This is indeed a marvelous pith instruction.

When Buddha Amitabha appears, it means that our Limitless Bodhi or Limitless Awakening appears. It means that the practitioner is living in Limitless Awakening, Limitless Longevity, and Limitless Light, instead of living with an ordinary mind like that of a sentient being. When Limitless Light appears, what does it mean? Before Buddha Amitabha [Limitless Light] appears, we

still have [dualistic thoughts of] right and wrong, good and bad, love and hatred, sad and angry, and we are still sentieng beings. Yet, once Amitabha Buddha appears, then sight is Buddha, hearing is Buddha, touch is Buddha, smell is Buddha, taste is Buddha. Everything arises from Buddha, thus all thoughts are none other than liberation and enlightenment. That is why the Buddha said that “*the multitude of Holy beings can appear in front of us right in the presence.*” It means that all of our thoughts are now pure and virtuous. They are Bodhi or Enlightenment; they are no longer conceptual thoughts clinging to suffering. That is what is known as “*Buddha Amitabha will appear with the multitude of Holy beings right in front of us in the presence.*” Later, when we actually die, in a split second, we will take birth in the Western Pureland of Ultimate Bliss. [If we can practice like that,] then even now when we have not yet died, we have already taken birth there.

We all want to arrive at the correct address of the Western Pureland of Ultimate Bliss. If so, first of all, we need to bring all root causes of suffering to an end, and



secondly, we have to live with Limitless Awakening. To see with Limitless Awakening, to hear with Limitless Awakening, to smell with Limitless Awakening, to taste with Limitless Awakening... and that means we are bringing to mind and maintaining Buddha Amitabha at all times. Whether standing, walking, sitting, or lying down, we are not confused by outer conditions and objects. All of the worldly knowledge no longer concerns us. Why? Because our heart-mind is filled with the joy that comes from the cessation of the ten root causes of suffering. Joy and bliss pervade our whole being. This is not simple, ordinary peace and happiness anymore – this is exactly the state we call the Western Pureland of Ultimate Bliss.

A mind of purity is a pure Buddhafield. When in our mind we relinquish all root causes of suffering, then we are already in the state of a pureland. There is no need to go anywhere else. This whole *samsara*, the worldly cyclic existence, transforms into a pureland. Once we have crossed the hundred thousand *koti* Buddha lands of mind, there is no longer any need to bring to mind and to

recite Buddha Amitabha, because Buddha Amitabha is already present. Our heart-mind is continually filled with joy and bliss, and it is no longer just regular happiness. This kind of practitioner has reached the realm of cessation of ten root causes of suffering – the cessation of five aggregates. Therefore, whether standing, walking, sitting or lying down, [the practitioner] is [continuously] Buddha Amitabha–Limitless Light. He or she no longer has to bring to mind, to hold and to maintain, or to think of, but it has already naturally become Buddha Amitabha without effort. Because if we can have seven days of singleness without distraction, then the physical body born by our parents would die, and we would be born in the realm of Western Pureland of Ultimate Bliss. For a brief moment, that which is old would die, the ten fetters would die, the five aggregates would die, and to be born in the Western realm of Ultimate Bliss means we would live in joy and bliss, in perfect joy and perfect bliss where there are no more seedlings of suffering in our mind-stream.

*“ . . . and recite my name even ten times – should not be born there, then may I not attain Perfect Enlightenment.”*

When we dedicate to cease ten root causes of suffering and when we maintain the name of Buddha Amitabha, it means we are living with our Limitless Awakening. Thus, at the time of death, if the Buddha does not take us across to the Western Pureland of Ultimate Bliss then he will not attain Perfect Enlightenment. That is truly wondrous.

If in our heart-mind there are no longer ten root causes of suffering, and there is only Limitless Awakening in the presence then where would we be? If we have already reached this level, then what? Then we have already become a Buddha. Therefore, if we attain such a level of realization and still have not attained Buddhahood, then there is no way that Buddha Amitabha could abide on the throne of Perfect Enlightenment. That is perfectly accurate and wonderful. How could anyone in such a [mental] state *not* become a Buddha? Whoever can

be like that would all become Buddhas.

The Buddha further stated that *“excluded, however, are those who commit the five heinous offences...”* The five heinous offences (or gravest actions) are the supreme offences, making it impossible to take birth in the land of Ultimate Bliss. The five heinous offences are creating division within the Sangha; killing an Arhat; killing one’s father; killing one’s mother; and shedding the blood of a Buddha. They lead one to rebirth in the incessant Avici hell. Incessant means the hell beings have to endure persecution and extreme torments with no period of respite. For example, beings are thrown into vast cauldrons of hot oil where they are cooked into indistinguishable pieces, then their bodies become whole once more. They repeat the same torments again and again. In the cold hell realms, the raw flesh and blood of the hell beings would freeze to death; once dead, they would be come back alive, and then would freeze to death again. Or [in the rounding-up and crushing hells], their bodies would be completely crushed in iron mortars, and then

reassembled, and once more, be crushed... Interminable and ceaseless without respite is the Incessant Hell Realm. Beings in the Avici hell realm experience immense torments without interruption in their mindstream. Therefore, they cannot possibly reach the Western Pureland of Ultimate Bliss.

The Buddha said that if we can maintain our mind like that, we can live like that and we can cease the ten fetters like that, then we can reach the Western realm of Ultimate Bliss, whereas someone who commits unwholesome deeds, then right at the moment when they kill their father, mother, create division in the sangha, kill an Arhat, shed blood of a Buddha, they would have to be placed in the Avici hell realm. Herein, the Buddha had to withhold [these people]; it means that the Buddha wanted to teach us that grave misdeeds bear grave results. [One cannot possibly commit grave misdeeds,] then just recite Buddha Amitabha's name ten times, and instantaneously reach his Pureland. We have to see through this.

*“Excluded are those who . . . abuse the Dharma.”*

It means the person who commits grave misdeeds cannot possibly reach the realm of Ultimate Bliss. This is extremely crucial. If someone does not believe in the Right Dharma, then can he or she possibly practice to end the ten root causes of suffering? Definitely not; that is not possible. Therefore, a Buddhist learner must study and practice the Four Noble Truths correctly in order to be considered as a person with the Right View. On the other hand, if one does not understand the Four Noble Truths and does not practice to bring the ten root causes of suffering to cessation, yet he or she claims to attain *nirvana*, then that that person does not have the Right View. Whoever does not believe in this is actually libeling the Right Dharma; there is no other logical reason other than this. Such a [non-virtuous] person cannot possibly arrive at the Western Pureland of Ultimate Bliss. Those are the words of the Buddha. If we don't bring the ten root causes of suffering to cessation, then it is impossible to bring an end to suffering, not even the mundane suffering of this world. If we speak about cause and effect, and if the cause

of this mundane world is suffering, then how can we at the same time have the fruition of *nirvana*? If so, then that is totally against the infallible law of *karma*, and that is abusing and libeling the Right Dharma. If right here we cannot have happiness, yet we demand to take birth in the realm of bliss, then we must re-examine ourselves to see whether the Right Dharma still remains with us or is already lost?

I am actually relying on the Buddha's ideas to speak about [these commentaries]. I wish that all Buddhist practitioners who bring to mind and recite the Buddha's name will be able to practice all of this in a most exact and proper way. We need to hold on tightly to the diagram and the address of the Pureland so that we can reach there together. The path that the Buddha taught us is very clear and non-erroneous; therefore, all Buddhist learners must look back at how we [truly] learn the Dharma. After speaking about all of this, I hope that everyone would generate the aspiration to arrive at the Western Pureland of Ultimate Bliss. I, too, [make such an

aspiration]. Why? Because for the sake of our practice life, if we do not transcend the one hundred thousand *koti* lands, then most likely our practice is nothing at all, and I can guarantee you that you are not going anywhere [with that kind of practice].

Because if we cannot overcome the ten root causes of suffering, then suffering remains intact. And if suffering is still here, completely intact, then while we clutch this suffering in our arms, where would we take it to? Who can resolve it on our behalf? Can Buddha Amitabha or Buddha Shakyamuni solve this for us? If Buddha Shakyamuni could solve it on our behalf, then he would have already done so. The Buddha came into our world and performed adaption and co-operative deeds (*samānārthatāsamgraha*); he became human and spoke our human language in order to take human beings across to the other shore. Yet, up until now we still have not been able to liberate ourselves from suffering.

Buddha Shakyamuni came here to guide us, but he could not solve our torments for us. Because the Buddha



had affirmed that, *“I am not a god who can give you blessings or deal you a death blow. I am not a judge who can reward or punish you. I am only a teacher who can show you the way.”* The Buddha saw the luminous path, the path to enlightenment and liberation. He conveyed this path to us so that all of us can follow in his footsteps toward enlightenment and liberation.

Buddha Amitabha said that he himself will not become a Buddha should all of those beings who have arrived in his pureland still endure suffering. Because if one has already relinquish the ten fetters, then how could there be any more suffering. We hear about the Western Pureland of Ultimate Bliss, and we think that once we reach there, our suffering immediately ceases, but that is wrong thinking. If in your mindstream, there are still root causes of suffering then you cannot be devoid of suffering no matter where you go. However, if you no longer have suffering right here, then there is no need to go to the Western Pureland of Ultimate Bliss. We thus need to have Right View to examine this specific point.

From the Theravadin to the Mahayana scriptures, whoever does not practice based on the foundation of the Four Noble Truths, then this is considered desecrating the Right Dharma of the Buddha. In retrospect, does someone who aspires to arrive at the Western Pureland of Ultimate Bliss base his practice on the foundation of the Four Noble Truths or not? If we do not [practice] based on this foundation, and if we do not resolutely and decisively bring all ten root causes of suffering to cessation, yet say that we have peace and happiness, then it is no different than holding illogical notions in conflict with the Dharma. The Buddha will definitely not come to receive us, because he already said that *“those who abuse the Dharma will not be taken across by me to Ultimate Bliss.”* The sublime Dharma of Buddha Shakyamuni, and of other Buddhas of the three times, is founded on the Four Noble Truths. If we want to end our suffering, then we must end the ten root causes of suffering. This is so clearly stated in all of the scriptures as it is not something hidden. All of us practitioners, whether of Zen, Pureland, Theravada, or

Mahayana Buddhism, should stand firmly on the foundation of the Four Noble Truths in order to practice the Dharma so that we are not guilty of slandering the Dharma. Only then are we considered to be upholding the Dharma. Only then can we hope for Buddha Amitabha to come receive us.

I, myself, deeply aspire to arrive at the Western Pureland of Ultimate Bliss, and throughout all of my practice sessions, I always dedicate toward attainment of the Pureland of Ultimate Bliss. I hope that you would take a look again at the diagram and dedicate toward the *correct address* [of the Pureland]. To aspire toward the Pureland of Ultimate Bliss is to aspire to completely cease all ten root causes of suffering. If we are currently cultivating faith, practice and aspiration, it means we must bring all ten fetters to an end. We believe that there exists the Western realm of Ultimate Bliss, we aspire to go there, and we practice our Dharma by transcending the mind of desire when it appears, by transcending the mind of anger when it appears. Then we have to transcend

ignorance, arrogance, doubt, belief in a self, extreme views, grasping at one's views, grasping at vows and wrong view. We must let everything be reposed, meaning there should be no more activities of the ten fetters, then that itself is the realm of Western Ultimate Bliss. This is a very clear address. I hope that we believe in the words of the Buddha as there is nothing erroneous.

Toward all practitioners who are reciting Buddha Amitabha from long ago until now, I hope that you, too, re-examine your diagram to see if it is up to the standard and whether it is the correct address that the Buddha spoke about? If you are going to the correct address, then congratulations to you. If any of you walks on a deviated path, meaning you don't believe in relinquishing all ten root causes of suffering yet still making it to the Western Pureland of Ultimate Bliss, then I feel that you have deviated from the path. Not believing in ending the ten fetters, yet attaining the realm of Ultimate Bliss, then this [practitioner] has accepted the wrong address. Not practicing according to the Four Noble Truths, yet thinking

that you can attain the fruition of the holy, sublime beings is considered insulting the Right Darma. Therefore, Buddha Amitabha will dismiss such a person.

If we continue to go on with this kind of commentaries then we will continue to be dismissed by Buddha Amitabha, and he would not allow us to remain in the Western Pureland of Ultimate Bliss. It is definitely going to happen like that, because that means we are abusing the Right Dharma. The Buddha has clearly pointed out the path; he has shown us what is proper, and thus, we must follow by actions in order to reach the Western Pureland of Ultimate Bliss.

If we have time to research the Pureland scriptures, we would see that there are many interesting and specialized points in the *Sixteen Contemplations Sutra*—the *Amitayus Long Life Sutra*. The logic systematically presented in the Pureland scriptures is the same as that in the Mahayana scriptures. Therefore, we cannot base our understanding merely on the words in a literal and ordinary sense. We must understand that these writings present

obscured meaning, not conspicuous meaning. For example, when Zen says East, then it must be understood as West and only then will we understand it all.

It is very clear that in the tradition of Theravadin or Mahayana Buddhism, Zen, or Pureland, all practices arise from the root spring of Buddhism. Thus, from the beginning to the end, nothing deviates. A Theravadin practitioner has to practice based on the foundation of the Four Noble Truths in order to end the ten root causes of suffering. The same goes for a Mahayana practitioner. A Zen practitioner who cannot bring the ten root causes of suffering to cessation cannot resolve anything. That goes for a Pureland practitioner, and a Secret Tantrayana practitioner as well; they cannot resolve anything either. After Buddha Shakyamuni became enlightened, he expounded the Four Noble Truths like a declaration of Buddhism. If any of us sentient beings in *samsara* does not practice according to that declaration, then that person is considered abusing the Right Dharma of the Tathagata.

Therefore, during the interval between the time

of Buddha Shakyamuni's full attainment until the appearance of Buddha Maitreya, if someone does not rely on the Four Noble Truths to practice, and he or she believes that there is another teaching more supreme than the Four Noble Truths, and not taking the basic steps to end the ten root causes to suffering yet trusting that he or she can be freed from all suffering, then that person is considered to have the logics of a non-Buddhist, not of the Right Dharma. Such a person will be dismissed by Amitabha Buddha and not allowed to enter the Western Pure Land of Ultimate Bliss. Among ourselves, we have to conclude that the study of the Buddha-Dharma is systematic and unified in an orderly fashion. From the past until the present moment, there may be people who overlooked the foundation of the Four Noble Truths, yet still want to practice to attain something. From the depths of my heart, I ask you to please turn back to examine the true and solid foundation of the Four Noble Truths that Buddha Shakyamuni expounded over 2,500 years ago without alteration ever since. This teaching forever re-

mains in cyclic existence, and predicates to be the luminous torch on the path leading us to liberation and awakening which has never dimmed. If we properly rely on the perfect Dharma and on the Four Noble Truths in order to practice, then we will never stray from the path. Whether you practice Zen, Pureland, secret Tantrayana, Theravada, or Progressive Mahayana Buddhism, I sincerely hope that you will not neglect the Four Noble Truths.

I have heard a number of people say that there is no need to do anything now because when one dies, one just recites Buddha Amitabha ten times and then will arrive at the Western Pureland of Ultimate Bliss. Please let me tell you, *that*, the Buddha never said and, *that*, the Buddha never taught. I have read through all the Buddha-Dharma scriptures, including the Progressive Mahayana as well as the Pureland texts, still, I could not find anything like that. Don't think that we do not need to practice diligently, we can just live leisurely, we can just create *karma* freely, and all we need to do when we are close at death is to bring to mind ten recitations of Buddha Ami-



tabha, and then the Buddha will take us across to the Western Pureland of Ultimate Bliss. Everyone would like that. But we should not misunderstand the Buddha's ideas. Otherwise, we would lead people to misunderstand our Buddha, Buddha Shakyamuni, Buddha Amitabha, and all Buddhas in the ten directions. There had never been any Buddha who came here to destroy the law of *karma* and to damage the typical life of sentient beings in the ten directions. If one can enjoy true peace and happiness while committing evil deeds, being heinous without limits, and all one needs to do is to bring to mind and recite Buddha Amitabha ten times in order to reach the Western Pureland of Ultimate Bliss, completely removed from painful torments, then where actually is *karma*?

We have to remember that Buddha Shakyamuni, the person who expounded this Sutra, had never left the foundation of the Four Noble Truths in order to speak [of this teaching]. We must comprehend this point to be awake again.

#### **4. Meaning of the Nine Stages of the Lotus Flowers**

The Pureland teachings mention about the sentient beings who bring the Buddha to mind would take birth in the *Nine Stages of the Lotus Flowers as Parents* in the seven-jeweled pond in the realm of Ultimate Bliss following their deaths. Let us together try to understand the meanings of the Nine Stages of the Lotus Flowers.

##### **The Superior Stages:**

1. Upper Superior Birth
2. Middle Superior Birth
3. Lower Superior Birth

##### **The Medium Stages:**

4. Upper Medium Birth
5. Middle Medium Birth
6. Lower Medium Birth

##### **The Inferior Stages:**

7. Upper Inferior Birth
8. Middle Inferior Birth
9. Lower Inferior Birth

Those are the nine stages of the realm of the Western Pureland of Ultimate Bliss where we can come to abide.

**Upper Superior Birth:** If one wants to take birth in the realm of Western Pureland of Ultimate Bliss, the highest is the Upper Superior Rebirth. First of all, one needs to have four [kinds of] mind when engaging in the practice of bringing to mind the Buddha: a mind of genuine, heartfelt devotion, a mind of profound gratitude, a mind of dedication, and a mind of Mahayana generation. At the time of death, [such a practitioner] would see the Buddha and countless Holy beings; [the practitioner] him or herself would be sitting on the *vajra* seat, and within a blink of an eye, would be born in the Western Pureland of Ultimate Bliss. Right at that very moment, the Buddha would open the eyes and the wisdom of [the practitioner] and he or she would achieve the state of perfect patience of the unborn Dharma [or the acceptance of non-origination]. Instantaneously, he or she would meet Buddhas of the ten directions, be endorsed by the

Buddhas, and right at that moment, return to Ultimate Bliss and achieve the attainment of limitless *Dharanis*.

*Genuine, heartfelt devotion* is a mind that is both sincere and burning toward practice. That is the first and foremost condition needed of all practitioners, no matter which practice, and not the Pureland practice alone. Without the mind of longing passion, we would not be able to progress on the path of practice efforts, because we would very easily be downhearted and will give way once we face difficulties and obstacles.

A Pureland practitioner who has genuine, heartfelt devotion toward the Western Pureland of Ultimate Bliss means that he or she has the utmost sincerity in every hour, every minute and every second, only and singlely thinking of enlightenment and liberation, and there is not another thing that one needs to do beside that.

Genuine, heartfelt devotion is a mind that always fervently turns toward the Western Pureland of Ultimate Bliss without a moment of interruption. This person wholeheartedly admires and venerates the Western Pure-

land of Ultimate Bliss, because when the ten root causes of suffering have already ceased, he or she will reach the Pureland instantaneously. If, at all times we want to surpass attachment, anger, ignorance, arrogance, doubt, belief in a self, extreme views, grasping at one's own view, grasping at vows, and wrong view, and we do not want these fetters to remain in our heart-mind, then this is called genuine, fervent devotion to practice.

*A mind of profound gratitude* means that one does not practice in a perfunctory or token manner over the days and months. It should be something that is highly profound, forever deep-seated and miraculous in one's mindstream. Thus, all of the amusements of the mundane world no longer are able to attract such a person; other than the practice efforts, [worldly amusements] no longer have any value. Practice becomes the the utmost importance in one's life. Such a practice becomes ultimate in one's life. With a mind of profound attitude, day and night we place ourselves in the morality of practice in order to be enlightened and liberated, and there is no other

thing to do beside that.

A mind of profound gratitude happens when we read the Mahayana Sutras, we can fathom the ultimate meaning of the Buddha's teachings and the unification of all of the Buddha's Sutras. When we say Buddha Amitabha, that is Limitless Longevity and Limitless Light; in the *Diamond Sutra*, it means Tathagata; in the *Lotus Sutra*, it means the Buddha's enlightened view; in the *Surangama Sutra*, it means the pure nature of the mind. There are many different terminologies used in different Sutras, but overall, they all have a single meaning, and that is none other than Limitless Awakening. There is no meaning other than that. This Limitless Awakening is referring to the Limitless Light and the Limitless Life, and there is not another thing but that. Once we have deep faith in this, no one can change or distort our understanding ever again. Our faith will never again degenerate, and that is called a mind of profound gratitude.

*A mind of dedication* means we perfectly and totally dedicate every single little effort or practice toward

the Western Pureland of Ultimate Bliss. It means we generate the mind to end the ten root causes of suffering. It means we generate the mind to bring our body of five aggregates to cessation, to live with Limitless Awakening, and there has not ever a single moment separating from it. To see with Limitless Awakening, to hear with Limitless Awakening, to smell with Limitless Awakening, and to taste with Limitless Awakening, and that is the same as directing all dedication toward the Western Pureland of Ultimate Bliss without forgetting even for a moment.

*A mind of Mahayana generation* is [the aspiration] to deliver all beings in the ten directions without exception to the other shore. [The idea is that] we have to love and to help each and every being. Whenever there is still a deluded being in the world realms, we must travel there to liberate that being, not neglecting any. We must understand that in reality, the world realms of the ten directions are unhindered and one and the same; therefore, when sentient beings are suffering, we ourselves are suf-

fering. If there is still suffering, then it cannot become the Western Pureland. However, this place right here must be Ultimate Bliss. We must transform this place into the Western Pureland so that all beings can reside here. That is the mind of Mahayana generation.

When a person with such a mind generation passes away, innumerable Buddhas will appear and he or she will be invited to step onto the jeweled lotus. In a finger-snap, he or she will meet Buddha Amitabha face to face and will practice in just a split of a second to attain the perfect patience of unborn Dharma.

**2. *Medium Superior Birth:*** This person reads and believes in the Mahayana Sutras. This means when that person listens to the expressive teaching about Limitless Awakening, he or she has feelings about it, can accept it, believes the Mahayana law of *karma*, and [believes that one needs] to end the ten root causes in order to attain that which is perfect peace and happiness. Such a person recites the Buddha's name, dedicates toward the Western Pureland and wants to meet Buddha Amitabha face to



face. At the time of death, he or she will see that a thousand Emanated Buddhas and Holy beings come to receive them and he or she is able to sit on the golden-purple lotus seat; within a blink of an eye, this person instantaneously reaches the Western Pureland of Ultimate Bliss. After one night, the flower will blossom. Relying on the Buddha, this person will have his or her wisdom eyes brightly opened. He or she would descend from the [lotus] seat, prostrate to the Buddha and practice for one small aeon before attaining the perfect patience of unborn Dharma [or the acceptance of non-origination].

Because this person only believes in the Mahayana Sutras, in the law of *karma*, yet he or she has not generated the Mahayana intention like the other person [from the Upper Superior stage]. In his or her life, he or she also practices and turns the mind to live in his or her genuine mind's nature. After passing, this person will also be received by the Buddha, but the lotus will only open after a single night. This person will have to practice for a small aeon before being able to realize the state of unborn

Dharma patience, before realizing mind's true nature and before merging with the realm of ultimate truth.

**3. Lower Superior Birth:** This is someone who believes in the law of *karma*, in the Mahayana scriptures, has established the mind generation although not truly exerting efforts in practice, and does make dedication toward the Western Pureland of Ultimate Bliss. At the time of death, this person sees five hundred Emanated Buddhas extending their hands [to receive him or her] at the same time; the person him or herself would be sitting on the lotus and the lotus would close up to follow the Buddhas to the lotus pond. The flower would only open up after one day and one night. In the first seven days, he will only have a shadowy glimpse of the Buddha. It is only after three weeks of diligent practice that this person would clearly see the Buddha body, get to be close to the Buddhas and to be of service to them, to get to listen to the profound teachings, and after three aeons, will attain the Joyous [first] *bhumi* in the ten *bhumis*.

**4. Upper Medium Birth:** This person lives a nor-

mal life, is vegetarian, keeps perfect vows and generates the mind of dedication toward Ultimate Bliss. At the time of death, he or she will see Buddha Amitabha and the assembly of the Holy beings radiating golden aura, expounding the Dharma about impermanence, suffering, emptiness and selflessness. The person him or herself will step into the lotus to bow down to pay homage to the Buddha, and by the time this person looks up, he or she will [instantly] reach the Western Pureland, continues to study the Four Noble Truths and will attain Arhatship.

At this level, the mind consciousness of the practitioners is a little less advanced [in comparison to those of the Superior level]. They are vegetarian and keep vows, and turn their minds toward the Western Pureland of Ultimate Bliss. They keep the five precepts, and sometimes they also receive the additional eight Mahayana precepts. After death, they will get to listen to the Buddha expounding the Dharma, before entering the lotuses to take rebirth in Ultimate Bliss. They would re-study the Four Noble Truths, although herein it does not mention the

time frame and we do not know for how long, but it is certain that they are at a lower level than those in the previous [Superior] level. They would have to pass through a rather long time before attaining Arhatship.

It is thus very clear that if we want to be reborn as human beings in our next life, we definitely need to re-study the Dharma in order to practice. In this lifetime, we have studied the Dharma extensively, we have been vegetarian, have kept vows as well as have precious merits, so it is obvious that we have the capacity to take rebirth as humans again in our next life. Therefore, being human, continuing to study the Four Noble Truths and attaining Arhatship is something not too difficult.

**5. *Middle Medium Birth:*** This person keeps his or her recitation of the Buddha on a regular basis, keeps the precepts totally pure for one day and one night, dedicating all merits toward the Western Pureland of Ultimate Bliss. At the time of death, this person would see Buddhas and the assembly of the Holy beings appear in their golden aura. He or she will sit on the seven-jeweled lotus; the

flower will close up and it will instantaneously arrive at the treasure pond. The flower only blossoms after seven days, and this person will attain Arhatship after practicing for a half-aeon.

**6. *Lower Medium Birth:*** This person is filial and has a kind heart. At the time of death, this person under the directions to practice by the virtuous teachers, would praise the vast aspirations of Buddha Amitabha and the realm of Ultimate Bliss. This person would listen and at the precise moment when life is ceased and during the time when he or she contracts or expands his or her arm, he or she would immediately be born in the realm of Ultimate Bliss. After seven days, he or she will get to listen to the Dharma as expounded by the Bodhisattvas, and will spend one small aeon [practicing] before reaching the Initial Attainment of Stream-Entry.

A person at this level, just like the elderly men and women here, who begin to go to the temple and receive the eight Mahanaya precepts when they are already aged. They have not exerted in practice in the past, but only

were introduced to the methods of practice by other people at the end of their lives. They only turn their minds [toward the Dharma] but have not resolutely practiced; thus, it is not certain that they would immediately get to meet the Buddha-Dharma [in their next life] because their spiritual heart-mind is still very weak.

Until after seven days will the blossom open up. That means after a period of time already leaving their bodies, they will be led to the [human realm] due to their filiality, and they can be born as human beings again but it is not certain that they will get to meet the Buddha-Dharma. The flower that has not yet opened up means the roots of virtues of such a person have not yet returned and blossomed. Therefore, after seven days may also mean a long period of time; it can also mean a few lifetimes afterward. This person at the present gets to listen the the propagation of the Dharma, to study the Dharma for a few sessions, and does think about the realm of Western Pureland of Ultimate Bliss but not so wholeheartedly. The seed [of Dharma] is not too strong in their heart-minds,

therefore, they do not feel an urge in their next life to immediately meet the Buddha-Dharma. Only after a long time that they get to be illuminated by the Bodhisattvas, but not by the Buddhas.

**7. *Upper Inferior Birth:*** This person commits many negative deeds. At the time of death, he or she gets to listen to the Mahayana scriptures and as he or she had faith and understanding [of the scriptures], he or she was able to relinquish all the heavy misdeeds throughout the thousands of lifetimes; if they put their hands together to bow to the Buddha then that alone can help destroy the heavy misdeeds of fifty more aeons. At the time of death, they will see the Buddha and the assembly of Holy beings radiating light; they will get to sit on the treasured lotus seats, follow the Buddha to the precious abode, and the lotus will only blossom after forty-nine days. Thereafter, they will be elucidated by the Bodhisattvas, study all kinds of Mahayana Sutras, generate the mind of Unsurpassed Dharma, and will cross over ten small aeons before reaching the Initial Attainment of Stream-Entry.

This is actually an inconceivable, virtuous condition. This is someone who has committed negative deeds, yet at the time of death, gets to be elucidated by the Bodhisattvas. It is not that they would be taught and trained in our mundane realm, but at the time of death, their consciousness gets to be elucidated by the Bodhisattvas and they get to study the Dharma in a different realm and be guided and delivered by the Bodhisattvas.

What does this tell us? Such a person has great merits and it is possible that this person had developed many virtuous connections with the Buddha-Dharma through many lifetimes. Thus, although he or she has committed negative deeds in this life, at the end of this life, this person still gets to be guided and elucidated. They do believe in, and understand, the Mahayana scriptures and during the dying process, can still recite the Buddha. That proves that this person already has roots of virtue from the past. That said, although he or she has the roots of virtue from the past, because he or she has committed too many negative deeds, when this person is led to



the precious abode after death, the flower will only open up after forty-nine days.

Thus, although this person gets to be elucidated by the Bodhisattvas, puts their palms together to recite the name of the Buddha, and is protected by his or her roots of virtues, it still takes a long time to return to the Dharma, to study the Dharma and to have the roots of virtue to flourish again. To be inside the lotus flower is a very compassionate expression in Buddhism. It means no matter how much evilness sentient beings may have committed, the Buddhas will still be ready to teach and to train [them all]. They will be placed inside the closed-up lotuses, brought back to the precious abode, and be kept there for forty-nine days before the flower blossoms. Therefore, because they committed negative misdeeds, it would take a very long time before they get to meet with, and to be elucidated by, the Bodhisattvas and to have their roots of virtue flourish again. Passing through ten small aeons, will they reach the Initial Attainment of Stream-Entry.

**8. *Middle Inferior Birth:*** This person is someone who commits misdeeds, breaks vows, steals from the Sangha of the ten directions, is a thief, robs lands, houses, foods and money from others, and has the impurity of the three doors [of body, speech and mind], etc. Therefore, at the time of death, the appearance of the hell realm will emerge, together with hundreds of thousands of torments and oppressions. Thanks to the blessings and teachings of the spiritual teachers who speak about the virtuous merits of Buddha Amitabha and [the three trainings of] discipline, meditation and wisdom, this person begins to grow a small seed of the Buddha-Dharma. After being born in the jeweled lotus flower, and after six small aeons, the flower will open up and he or she will get to listen to the Bodhisattvas expounding the Mahayana Sutras, and through that, will begin to develop the mind pleading for the Unsurpassed Dharma.

Therefore, it takes over one hundred thousand years before the lotus opens up. When the flower blossoms, that means we have a little bit of freedom, and

when the flower has not yet opened up, then we will be kept in bondage inside that flower. We do not know what we have to bear with inside that flower. However, this is a very skillful [expression]. It does not say that we would be met with damnation, that we would have to bear with our negative *karma* and have to suffer, and it does not say that we have to be led to the Avici hell realm, but nevertheless it does say that we will have to remain in that lotus flower for six small aeons before the flower blossoms so that we can gain some freedom. An evil person like that would have to be caught inside the lotus to pay back the negative *karma*. So that is very much in accordance with the law of *karma*—cause and effect. [Later on,] he or she will get to listen to the two Great Bodhisattvas, Avalokiteshvara and Mahasthamaprapta expounding the Dharma, to begin to generate the mind of Bodhicitta, to believe in the attainment of Unsurpassed, Proper, Equanimous, and Perfect Enlightenment, and to make aspiration to reach this level, although he or she has not yet accomplished any realization.

**9. *Lower inferior Birth:*** This person commits all types of evil deeds, including the five heinous crimes, the ten negative misdeeds, etc. At the time of death, the hell realm begins to appear. He or she will be reminded by a spiritual friend to practice and to bring Buddha Amitabha to mind, but he or she is not able to immediately recite the Buddha due to his or her having to suffer greatly and feeling oppressed. However, eventually, since this person is being urged by so many people, he or she will begin to recite the name of the Buddha. If this person single-mindedly maintains the Buddha in mind, then at the time of death, Buddha Amitabha will receive and lead him or her to the realm of Ultimate Bliss. Through twelve great aeons, the lotus will blossom. This person will get to be taught and trained by the two Bodhisattvas, Avalokiteshvara and Mahasthammaprapta, to learn all of the Mahayana Sutras, to generate the mind of Bodhicita and to develop faith in the Three Jewels.

One small aeon is equal to sixteen millions, seven hundreds and ninety-eight thousand years. One medium

aeon is equal to twenty small aeons and one great aeon is equal to twenty medium aeons, and then if we multiply that by twelve, we would reach an inaccountable amount number of years. Thus, it is clear that if one commits the five heinous crimes, one will be instantaneously lead to the Avici hell ream, and there is no other way about it. Although the Bodhisattvas have love to this person and they generate the heart-mind to teach and to guide him or her, however, this person will definitely have to suffer depravtion for a very, very long time. To be caught in the lotus up to twelve great aeons is a period of time that is incalculable. To be born in the Avici hell realm means to suffer on and on without interruption, which is also known as the Hell Realm of Uninterruption. However, it is something that the scritpure avoids saying. One must definitely suffer in the hell realm if one commits such evil crimes and definitely the hell realm will appear at the time of death. It will be impossible to recite the name of the Buddha at that time. However, due to the urging, the recitation, the encouragement of so many people [at the

time of death], this person him or herself ends up having to orally recite the name of the Buddha. Although he or she may single-mindedly [bring to mind the Buddha] near the ending phase before his or her last breath comes to a stop, this person will still be caught in the lotus for twelve great aeons before the flower will open up. Then, he or she will get to be taught and trained by the Bodhisattvas, to begin to study the Mahayana Sutras, to generate trust in the Three Jewels, and to generate the mind of Bodhicitta, pleading for ultimate liberation, although this person has not yet accomplished any realization.

This is where we can see the kindness of the Buddha, or in other words, it means that our true nature has always been present within us. That is the root of where all of us should turn our minds toward. Whether sentient beings want to or not, it is where all beings must return to. Even if we were led to the Avici hell realm, it still remains within our true nature and within the realm of Western Pureland of Ultimate Bliss. There is this unborn and undying pristine true nature in all sentient

beings, no matter if these beings have taken birth in the cyclic existence, and whether they have committed crimes. Over time, they will liberate themselves from the status of sentient beings to return to their authentic true nature. Thus, that is why the lotuses would take them across to the Western Pureland of Ultimate Bliss.

It means this [mental] state always abides within all sentient beings and is never lost, and no matter how all beings migrate back and forth in cyclic existence, they can never slip away from the Western Pureland of Ultimate Bliss. Even if one has committed the five heinous crimes, one would still be taken to the Western Pureland of Ultimate Bliss. And the Western Realm of Ultimate Bliss is actually within one's own true nature. That is the quiet and serene [mental] state devoid of all conceptual thoughts, which every sentient being must return to, and therein, peacefully abide. No matter which sentient being and no matter how many crimes one has committed, one will be forever enwrapped and upheld by one's true nature. When sentient beings are disgusted by the cyclic

existence and want to return to their true nature, then their nature will emerge. Meanwhile, during the [in-between] phase, sentient beings must still repay their *karma*—cause and effect.

No matter whether it is a period of one small aeon or ten small aeons, *karma* will never deviate. Even if it is a miniscule *karma*, one will still have to fully repay it, and although one does not know in which ways one would have to pay back the *karma*, one cannot run away from cause and effect. Let's say that we have killed a person, and then at the time of death, we recite ten times so that Buddha Amitabha will receive us and deliver us to the Western Pureland of Ultimate Bliss and thus we can be protected there, and do not have to repay any *karmic* debts. Afterwards, can we just remain there to practice all the way to becoming Buddha? If that were the case then that is shattering [the law of] cause and effect.

Herein, the *Nine Stages* are being affirmed so that we can understand which are the different levels of birth in the Western Pureland of Ultimate Bliss. In reality, that



is the *samaric* cycle of birth and death that is determined based on the nine levels that go from the hell realm, to the hungry ghost realm, the realms of animals, Gods, semi-Gods, human, Hearers, Self-Realizers and Bodhisattvas. The *Nine Stages* are the nine levels of birth of sentient beings. It does not matter how we sentient beings go through cyclic existence as one day, we will be awakened and be fully enlightened. That is a very sincere encouragement, filled with love and compassion, by the Buddha. No matter which sentient being, they will all be awakened and enlightened by the Buddha over time so that they can turn back to live in the peaceful realm of the Buddha, and to become enlightened and liberated thereafter. That is the tolerance and the loving-kindness of the Buddha who does not omit any one sentient being. Even for those beings who have committed the heaviest crimes, like those of the Lower Inferior Birth, they would still be placed in the lotus flower, be enwrapped and upheld by their roots of virtue, although the scriptures do not say in which ways they would have to repay their *karmic* debts.

However, these beings are still being sheltered and protected by the Buddha, waiting until one day when their roots of virtue will blossom so that they can go on being taught and trained. That means they will have to fully pay off their *karma* before they will be initiated and reminded [of their true nature] by the Bodhisattvas so that they can return to enlightenment and liberation. It is such a wonderful way of expression by the Buddha!

The *Nine Stages* speaks about the loving-kindness and compassion of the Buddha-Dharma which leaves out no sentient being throughout the three worlds. [In reality,] they are not the nine levels in that Pureland but in the nine realms of our own mind. Whichever mental level we are in corresponds with how we repay our *karma* in that specific level. We have to bear with the cycle of life and death to resolve a specific *karma* before attaining enlightenment and leap off to another [higher] level to live; this is very difficult. If there is still a fetter, yet we want to take birth in the Western Pureland of Ultimate Bliss, then that is critically difficult. [After all], that is the qualifi-

cation the Buddha had pointed out to us, that one must cross over the one hundred thousand *koti* lands, transcending the ten root causes of suffering.

Herein, we must make an assertion: Speaking about cause and effect, the *Nine Stages of the Lotus Flowers* discusses [birth in the Pureland] very minutely, clearly, in sequence and in detail, and it is not in conflict with *karma* and the fruition of causes. If one says that one can commit a misdeed, yet can still be received and delivered to the other shore without ever having to pay back his or her *karma*, then that is breaking the law of cause and effect of Buddhism. If so, then the Pureland cannot be accepted in this world. The *Nine Stages* on the other hand still talks about the sequence of *karma* and the fruition of causes. It discusses everything very thoroughly based on the foundation of *karma*. The *Shorter Amitabha Sutra (Sukhavativyuha Sutra)* also discusses in great clarity about the foundation of practice which is the Four Noble Truths. Thus, the *Shorter Amitabha Sutra* is none other than a different expression of the Four Noble

Truths. It speaks about the ultimate, highest teaching which is to recognize the unborn, undying true nature of the entirety of sentient beings, and then [from thereon] to attain perfect happiness and liberation.

Whoever has not yet seen Buddha Amitabha appear, and has not ended all ten root causes of suffering, is someone who can never be happy and peaceful. This is a very basic point, as there is no second road to liberation except to bring the ten fetters to cessation. If there is still a tiny bit of the ten fetters present, then that person will never ever reach the Western Pureland of Ultimate Bliss. That is why it is said that one must cross over the one hundred thousand *koti* lands before arriving at the Western Realm, which is the place of quiet serenity and of complete cessation of all of our habitual *karma*.

So then, that is the *Nine Stages of the Lotus Flowers* in the realm of Ultimate Bliss. Regarding the Upper Superior stage, we will probably not make it; however, we will most likely end up in the Middle Superior stage. Because when we read the Mahayana scriptures, we

believe that there is Limitless Life, Limitless Light, and we also believe in *karma* – cause and effect. Believing in the Mahayana *karma* means we realize the unborn nature, and within this unborn state of mind's nature, we can take all beings across and lead them all to the fruition of awakening. When we talk about believing in Mahayana *karma*, of cause and effect, it means we read and recite the Mahayana scriptures and understand the ultimate, highest meaning.

If we read the Mahayana scriptures without denigrating them, then perhaps we are already in the Middle Superior level as [we cannot think of it] being so simple. According to the Western Pureland of Ultimate Bliss, we are no less than those practitioners who recite and bring the Buddha to mind. Because we firmly believe in that which is called Limitless Life and Limitless Light. Thus, it means that we are already in the Middle Superior stage. We can assert that it is so, as the Buddha already clearly stated that those taking birth in the Middle Superior stage are those who read the Mahayana Sutras without sus-

picion, doubt, or disdain. The way the Buddha described the moment these people leave the world is truly beautiful when the golden lotus flowers will appear and they themselves will step into the flowers. Once they arrive in the Pureland, they will only be obscured overnight, and the next morning, they will immediately get to meet Buddha Amitabha face to face. How splendid!

The single obscured night that the Buddha described in the Sutra is the moment our body of five aggregates actually dies, so that when we open our eyes again, we immediately see Buddha Amitabha. That is the one and the same as meeting our own Limitless Awakening face to face. Why? Because we have already relinquished the ten root causes of suffering! Since we firmly believe that we can overcome the ten root causes of suffering and that we have Limitless Awakening in which we can immerse ourselves in, we will only be obscured very briefly before seeing our own nature – Buddha Amitabha. This is equivalent to a Zen practitioner who attains complete, ultimate realization [of mind's nature]. And that is Middle

## Superior Birth.

If we continue to generate the aspiration and dedicate all merits to bringing all ten root causes of suffering to cessation, we will definitely reach the Western Pureland of Ultimate Bliss. Only when we can completely relinquish all root causes can we be certain [of our birth in the Pureland]. The first step is to bring to cessation desire, anger, hatred, ignorance, arrogance, doubt, belief in a self, extreme views, grasping at one's own views, grasping at vows, and wrong view, and only then can we reach the Western Pureland of Ultimate Bliss. The second step is to see Buddha Amitabha face to face. That is the true address—the diagram of Ultimate Bliss. It is completely accurate and never erroneous.

If anyone believes that they have Limitless Life, Limitless Light, and Limitless Awakening, and that they have that which is unborn and undying, then it means they have already practiced the Dharma for hundreds of thousands of years. One cannot develop such deep trust merely in one lifetime. Just as is said in the Sutra, such a

practitioner needs to pass through many great aeons, and to study all the basic Buddhist teachings throughout the time before he or she can have this faith, and then afterwards, can reach the Initial Attainment of Stream-Entry. Here we are sitting and already believing what the Buddha proclaimed in the Mahayana scriptures to be true and correct, and believing that our true nature is unborn and undying, so it is clear that we already belong to the Superior stage. We must nominate ourselves to the Superior stage, and why? Because we have maintained our vows, are full-time vegetarian, believe in the Mahayana scriptures and the law of *karma* – cause and effect; thus, we are no longer ordinary beings. Today we study [the *Nine Stages of the Lotus Flowers as Parents*] so we know that we are not so inferior. If we believe that a pure mind is [one and the same as] a Buddha's Pureland, and we know what we must practice so that our mind can be purified and so that we can correspond harmoniously with a Buddha's realm, then that means we belong to those with great, not small, root mental capacity.



In the Pureland practice scriptures, there is this one sentence, “*Even with just one single recitation of Amitabha unmixed with any other thought, one can reach the Western Buddha Land of Ultimate Bliss within a single fingersnap.*” It means that with only one single recitation, we can swiftly merge with our nature of Ultimate Bliss because our mind is not contaminated by even a single conceptual thought. This pith instruction is actually very profound and very Zen-like.

The lowest of the Superior stages is the Lower Superior wherein people believe in Mahayana Buddhism although they do not practice it; they believe in the Mahayana *karma*, as well as recite and dedicate merits toward rebirth in the Pureland. However, they have not yet practiced the Mahayana virtuous activities which are meant to help and save all beings and all species [from suffering]. These people only practice for their own benefit and still get to reach the Western Pureland at the time of death. Why is that so? Because if they are determined to end all ten root causes of suffering, then everyone of them will

reach there. It is very clear that we are above this stage, because we have helped others. When we see other beings being tormented, and we provide assistance to them, then we are actually practicing the virtuous activities of Mahayana. The Lower Superior beings, on the other hand, do not practice the Mahayana virtuous activities; they only have faith in *karma* and bring the Buddha to mind with recitation.

We will not discuss the other lower stages, but only the three higher stages here: Upper Superior, Middle Superior and Lower Superior. We definitely belong to [one of] these three stages because we are Buddhists who have taken refuge vows, are full-time vegetarians, and have practiced all of our lives. We have done much of this. Thus, let's say if we belong to the Middle Superior stage, then at the time of death, we will enter the jeweled lotus flower and be taken across to the Western Pureland; we will get to listen to the Buddha proclaiming the Dharma, and thereafter, practice to attain Arhatship.

Then in regards to beings in the Middle Medium

stage, they keep vows only for one day, and once in a while they would take the eight Mahayana precepts only for one day, would enter the temple to keep pure vows only for one day and would recite the Buddha to dedicate to their birth in the Western Pureland of Ultimate Bliss. However, it takes seven days for the lotus to open up, and they have to practice for half of a small aeon before they can attain Arhatship. When we study the Nine Stages of the Lotus Flowers, then we would realize clearly where we would take birth in and what we would accomplish.

Beings in the Lower Medium stage are ordinary people living in this *samsaric* world who are good citizens in their society, have a kind heart, and also keep their filial obligations. After they hear about the Western Pureland of Ultimate Bliss, they begin to recite and dedicate merits [toward this birth]. At the time of death, they also can arrive at the Western Pureland, but their lotus flowers will not open for forty-nine days, after which they will have to practice for one small aeon to attain Arhatship. I think we are more guaranteed [a place

in the Pureland] than people in this stage. And we probably would not be engaged in the three lower stages, because we do not disparage the Right Dharma and we do not commit negative misdeeds.

Regarding the Inferior stages, we will not have a part in them. When people in the Inferior stages die, the hell realm will appear to them, and they are being reminded to recite the name of the Buddha. The lotus flower does not open up for half an aeon, and once it is blossomed, they get to study all the basic Buddha-Dharma, to practice for six small aeons before they will have faith and can generate the mind of Bodhicitta. They will not accomplish any attainment as this is a very inferior level.

We study the Dharma in order for ourselves to examine the nine stages. We would automatically know where we will take birth, and at the present, we must aspire to be born in the Western Pureland of Ultimate Bliss. I, too, want to make such an aspiration. All of us must generate this sincere aspiration, and we must begin to

practice (through faith, performance, and aspiration). Together, we all aspire to take birth in the Western Pureland of Ultimate Bliss, and that means we make aspiration to end all ten root causes of suffering. Only when we bring these root causes to cessation that we will reach there, and definitely, we will see Buddha Amitabha face to face. And that is our mind and that which generates our aspiration.

So now we must practice to end desire, anger, ignorance, arrogance, doubt, belief in a self, extreme views, grasping at one's own views, grasping at vows, and wrong view. We have to put them all to a deep sleep and not allow them to ever be active again. If they have completely come to a rest, then we will reach our destination, but if they continue to be there [to make waves] then we will not be able to reach the Western Pureland.

Secondly, the Buddha dismisses those people who disparage the Dharma, and commit the five heinous crimes. If he or she does not practice the Four Noble Truths, yet still wanting to arrive at the Western Pureland

of Ultimate Bliss, then that person can be considered a destroyer of the Right Dharma. When having enough faith that one needs to put in effort to bring the root causes of suffering to cessation, then the person will not be convicted as someone who impairs the Right Dharma. Then there is hope that one will get a ticket to enter the gate of the Western Pureland. However, if you are heedless, clinging to the view that you don't need to practice anything, and that you can merely recite Buddha Amitabha in order to reach the Western Pureland, then be cautious that you may not even get to its front gate. Anyone who recites the Buddha must be aware of this.

When we recite (or bring the Buddha to mind), that means we bring to mind Limitless Awakening and we live with Limitless Awakening. It means that in whichever circumstance we find ourselves in this very life, our eyes see with awakening; our ears hear with awakening; our nose smells with awakeing. Whether we walk, stand, sit, lie down, are awake, or sleeping, we abide in a state of awakening, and so that is called reciting Buddha Ami-

tabha. It means that there is not a single moment when we are deluded in the cycle of birth and death. We never allow ourselves to let desire, anger and ignorance happen in our seeing and hearing. That is, after all, how we can bring to mind Buddha Amitabha, our own Limitless Awakening.

Buddha Amitabha is actually the present wisdom-knowingness within us right in this very moment. Within our six senses, if we can uninterruptedly live with this present wisdom-knowingness, then that means we are bringing Buddha Amitabha to mind and bringing all root causes of suffering to cessation. That means we are already in the state of the Western Pureland of Ultimate Bliss. This is a very accurate address. I sincerely hope that each and every one of you will draw up a diagram and use it so that you can walk in and out of this place with ease, and so that from now on, you will never deviate from this address. Henceforth, we need to enhance this diagram in our heart-mind, and to hold on tightly to the address. It has been over 2,500 years, but the Buddha has not

changed its address. Thus, this address is the accurate, correct address as it is unmistakable.



**III. DHARMAKAYA AMITABHA – THE UNIMPEDED  
AND EQUANIMOUS REALM OF ALL  
COMPASSIONATE BUDDHAS**

When all Buddhas in the ten-direction *dharmadatu* become Buddhas, they would only have one and only one practice. And what is that practice? It is the practice of liberation, and nothing else. Moreover, all Buddhas are but one Dharmakaya.

But let us first discuss about the equanimous state because all of us here are equal; for example, how our seeing is not different [from another person's seeing] right here and in this moment. Different appearances come in front of our eyes, and we all have the same seeing. All of us who are sitting here have the exact same seeing, and thus, when we all become Buddhas, we will all merge in the exact same Dharmakaya and there is no distinction. So does this mean all Buddhas are one single Buddha or distinct Buddhas? Is it different or is it the same? Here in

the *Avatamsaka Sutra*, it says that all Buddhas only have one single Dharmakaya (one single Dharma body). What does this mean? Does it mean all Buddhas use the same common [enlightened] body?

Just like when we see outer appearances, are we using the same, common seeing [that we all possess], or are we using our own individual seeing? Well, for us, we are probably using our own individual seeing. But definitely not the Buddhas; they [do not rely on] individuality, and yet, it is not commonality or generality either. And that is truly marvelous. When we can understand the idea of “not common, not individual,” then we will be able to understand the genuine state of the Buddhas.

When we talk about our generality (or commonality), it means that no matter how many sounds there are, we will all hear those sounds at the same time. We cannot use the hearing of another person to hear for ourselves, and our hearing cannot be used to obstruct or to infringe on the hearing of the person next to us. As many sounds

as the person next to us can hear, we hear that many sounds. If we sit together in the same place, we see the appearances and hear the sounds just like everyone else in the room. In our seeing and hearing, when there is no duality involved, then we are equal in this way.

Therefore, if we possess the hearing in order to hear one sound, then the Buddha also possesses the same hearing to hear one sound, and another Buddha, too, also hears one sound based on the same hearing. If we look at all of this in a certain perspective, then what exactly is this? That is what is called “common” and “one.”

However, when we talk about the supreme state of all the Buddhas, we can say that it is one, but at the same time, it is not one. Although it is not one, it does not have a singular self [like we all purportedly have]. We really need to understand this point well. Buddha Shakyamuni is not the same as Medicine Buddha, but these two Buddhas do not possess two separate, distinct selves like we do right now. We are different from the friend sitting next to us, completely different. Both we and our friend have

different knowledges and different habitual tendencies. We have too many different things among us. However, all Buddhas are utmostly purified of all [consciousness-based] knowledge and utmostly purified of all habitual tendencies. All that is left is wisdom. Thus, all Buddhas are equal in insight wisdom, equal in mind's nature, and equal in their wondrous applications or manifestations. Once they reach this supreme realm, *all Buddhas are equally non-discriminating without distinction.*

Let us now imagine the following. Anyone who has stayed in a five-star hotel knows that the hotel has a common source of electricity. When they switch on the electrical source, all of the lights will be ignited. Just take this building here as another example. When we turn on the main electrical source, then it will affect all these fans and all these lights, no matter how many. All comes from the same source; however, the fans will rotate in their own distinct ways and all the lights will become luminous in their own distinct ways. Nevertheless, when we talk about electricity, then it has the same common source.

If we understand “common” (or “general”) in that way, then would that be a correct or an erroneous understanding? It is actually incorrect. The meaning is not at all like that when we refer to the common source of all Buddhas. In reality, when we switch off the electrical source, then all of these fans will be turned off, and when the electrical source is initiated again, then all of these fans will be turned on again. It means that all of these fans actually use the same electrical source.

However, here, we must understand “*all Buddhas are equal in one single Dharmakaya*” does not mean that it is “common” in the same way as explained above. For now, we have not yet become Buddhas, but our Buddha Shakyamuni has already reached perfect attainment. Sentient beings here are still deluded, but our Buddha had already become perfectly enlightened. But in the future, if one of us becomes a Buddha, then there will be another Buddha in this world. Furthermore, it does not mean that if Buddha Shakyamuni reaches extinction [or is “switched off”], then all the other Buddhas will be “switched off.”

No, there is no such extinction! Thus, in the future when we and all sentient beings in the ten-direction *dharmadatu* become Buddhas, then there is not a slightest distinction between one realm of a Buddha versus the others. Absolutely no difference whatsoever!

Thus, please don't say that this Buddha made an aspiration so there is this world realm over here, and another Buddha made such and such an aspiration, and so there is such and such a world realm there. If we say things like that, then we are erring, yet we have studied the Dharma according to such an [erroneous] view.

In the *Amitabha Sutra*, it says that when Buddha Amitabha was still Dharmakara Bodhisattva, he made great aspirational vows that after he reached Buddhahood his pure realm would be like this and like that; for example, “*if any sentient being brings to mind and recites my name, then I will take that being across to my Buddha-field.*” All this time, we believe that there is only Buddha Amitabha who made such an aspiration, and we believe that for all beings who bring Buddha Amitabha to mind,

Buddha Amitabha will receive them and deliver them to his Pureland after they pass away. So then, what about Buddha Shakyamuni? Does it mean our Lord Buddha Shakyamuni has no such loving compassion? And we also believe that none of the other Buddhas can possibly deliver us, but Buddha Amitabha and only Buddha Amitabha can deliver us? Is that right?

If we have such an understanding, then I am afraid that we are actually libeling the Buddha. Because once the supreme realm of the compassionate Buddhas is attained, then all Buddhas are equally indiscriminating without distinction! They are equal in insight wisdom without distinction. Their realm is equally indiscriminating without distinction. Thus, the instant one becomes a Buddha, one instantaneously and spontaneously merges in the unimpeded and equanimous realm. That means the unimpeded and equanimous realms of all the compassionate Buddhas are [equally] the same. Magnificent and blazingly radiant without distinction!

The Buddhas in the ten directions would know whenever someone follows Buddha Shakyamuni to study and practice. Through our ordinary eyes, we cannot see this, but the truth is that each and every move of all beings in all the world realms is known with clarity, not simply by our Buddha Shakyamuni, but by all the Buddhas of all ten directions. Thus, even a small movement of ours will be clearly known and testified by all the Buddhas of the ten directions. All the Buddhas of the ten directions will bear witness to each and every movement of ours.

Thus, if one being brings to mind and recites the name of one Buddha, then that will reach and touch all the Buddhas of all ten directions. It is not as if only Buddha Amitabha will know with clarity that we have recited his name. Therefore, the moment a virtuous thought or an evil thought arises in our mindstream, all Buddhas will clearly know. However, the wondrous thing is that all Buddhas will simultaneously and concurrently know it. All Buddhas will know with clarity at the very same time al-



though they never generate the conceptual thought of examining us.

When we reach a state of deep meditation, then we will be able to fully grasp the above idea. This is because our mind's true nature can always recognize and cognize everything very clearly no matter which tiny conceptual thought arises in our mind, and no matter in which form this thought manifests. Our mind's nature does not need to [deliberately] conceptualize, nor contemplate, nor examine, nor illuminate. If there is still [deliberate] contemplation and [deliberate] illumination, that is an error. If there is still contemplation and illumination, that is in the form of consciousness and not our true nature.

Consciousness still sees what's there, what's not there, what's right, what's wrong, what remains, what already got lost, what's aware, and what's confused. When we are awake and have wisdom insight, we see ourselves as pure. When we are awake, we can recognize and we get to know and to hear everything. However, when we are confused, we may go on reciting Buddha's name for a

few hours and all of a sudden, realize that we have not been mindful. Then, we return to our mindfulness, and then we go on complaining, “I already realized my mind’s true nature. How come today I recognize my thoughts but tomorrow I may not?” That is not realizing one’s nature. If you realize your nature then there should not be any changes, but if there are changes, then that’s not your nature.

Thus, we must clearly see that the Dharmakaya of all Buddhas is, seemingly, just one. If we use ordinary language in a certain dimension then we will see that all of the Buddhas in the ten directions merge in one same Dharmakaya – this is completely correct and unerring. However, if we say that each and every Buddha is distinct, then that, too, is completely correct and unerring.

Therefore, if one already belongs to the realm of the Buddhas, then there is not even the slightest difference; however, the Buddhas do not abide in commonality, and yet, they do not abide individually either. Commonality does not mean that they are like us here, with all

these people sitting here in the same house. Why? Because the abode of all the Buddhas is actually the *dharmadatu* – the Dharma realm – of the ten directions. It is not a private [individual] place in which they reside.

However, once a Buddha has become a Buddha, then the Buddha's [enlightened] body – the Dharmakaya – actually pervades the whole *dharmadatu* of the ten directions. Nowhere in this *dharmadatu* is *not* Buddha's body. Even when we are sitting here, standing here, or walking here, we are actually walking in Buddha's Dharmakaya body. Buddha's [enlightened] body spreads out the *dharmadatu* in its entirety! And all of the Buddhas are also actually the Dharmakaya body pervading the entire *dharmadatu*. No Buddha's enlightened body ever pervades in a private [individual] way.

Therefore, in the Sutras, Buddha Shakyamuni had said that, “*Everywhere in this dharmadatu, there is not a single place where I have not laid down my [enlightened] body.*”

People used to reason that, due to hundreds of thousands of lives in cyclic existence, Buddha Shakyamuni had lived in this world of ours innumerable times. For example, in this country, there is a piece of land that Long Huong Temple sits on. It is only one hectare, but the Buddha passed across it back and forth, back and forth countless times. He has been buried here from the front of the gate to the back of the temple. Everywhere on this piece of land has been the burying place of Buddha's body. Thus, if you take a drill and stake in anywhere on this land, then you would touch Buddha's body. Many people explained it in this way. Well, if you want to think of it that way, then it is not wrong per sé. However, if we want to understand it in a proper way, then when we say that Buddha's body pervades the entire *dharmadatu* in the ten directions, what kind of body is that? It is not the same kind of physical body that took birth and died in the same ordinary that we used to think of. Only if we now take a drill and stake it anywhere in the entire *dharmadatu* in the ten directions, and it touches the body of the Buddha, then

that is truly what's called "the body of the Buddha pervading the ten-direction realm." If our understanding is like that, then it is not necessary correct.

Thus, we can now see that the meaning of Dharmakaya is that everywhere is the [enlightened] body of the Buddha, and everywhere is the Dharma of the Buddha; everywhere in the ten-direction world realm are the [enlightened] body parts of the Buddha. And what actually is that? It is the equanimous true suchness without any distinctions of all the Buddhas!

Even after billions and billions of years into the future, when there is someone who would become a Buddha at that time, then that Buddha would possess the exact same Buddha's realm as that of our own historical Buddha Shakyamuni. How, indeed, is the realm of our historical Buddha described in the Sutras? Equanimous, pure, without mounds and hillocks, without females, without evil beings, and without numerous other things. However, in this world of ours, there are females, mounds and hillocks, and evil beings, so does that mean that our

world is not a Buddha's realm? The Buddha descended as a human being into our cyclic world in order to attain Buddhahood. Yet, will we dare to affirm that this world is a Buddha's realm? No, because this is still an ordinary cyclic realm.

Where did this ordinary cyclic realm come from? It appears because our mind is still a sentient being's mind so we end up clearly seeing with assertion that this world is a cyclic world. However, from the view of an enlightened being, this is already an utmostly pure realm. It is not that inside the temple is pure and outside on the street is not pure. According to the Buddhas, the entire *dharma-datu* is equally pure. This is the truth. They see everywhere as a realm of perfect pureness of all the Buddhas. To them, this world is perfectly equanimous, and there is not even a slightest distinction.

There is no need to discuss this because it is obvious that the Buddha is non-discriminating. One day when we reach this state of non-duality and realize the state of perfect equanimity of someone who has merged

with the true nature of mind – we are merely speaking of merging with the true nature of mind here and not yet speaking of becoming a Buddha – then we, too, would recognize what absolute equanimity means to a Buddha. At that moment, we will see how this *dharmadatu* is truly pure, and how the world system is truly in great order.

Right now we still see this universe as being in chaos, don't we? Just like when we look outside at the streets, the cars seem to be running everywhere and in all directions, but the reality is that, if the traffic system did not exist in an orderly fashion, then many accidents would happen every day and the cars would pile up into a mountain. The reality is that, although the cars seem to be moving in a chaotic fashion, they still operate in an exceptionally orderly way. Once in a while there are a few cars [that travel] out of order, thus, accidents happen; otherwise, everything on the streets nearly follows its own order. And the same exists with this world of ours; it has always followed its own order. If we look at a market place, or a gathering place of ten thousand or twenty

thousand people, we can see that all these people have to follow their own order in order to reach their destination; otherwise, everyone would end up stuck in a pile, and no one could go anywhere.

And so is the movement of all the *dharmas*, of all the phenomena in this universe; they follow such an exceptionally orderly fashion. However, it is we who don't understand [how phenomena actually function]. On the other hand, if we can understand the law of the universe, then we can see how this *dharmadatu* functions: orderly, peacefully, and equanimously.

However, at the moment we still see this world as full of erratic uncertainties, suffering and all sorts of entanglements, and that we should not remain here for too long. But that is not the true reality. Once this Mother Earth explodes, then all of the sentient beings on this earth will die. We ourselves will no longer be human beings. If we will no longer be human beings, then there is no need for us to cling to this earth in order to live. We will move on to another world realm, and we will no longer have the



need to eat rice for survival. In the new world system, we will possess a different kind of food, and it will encompass the entire vastness of space, instead of being limited to this earth. Thus, just in case someone tells you that this earth will soon explode, there is no need to be fearful! We will meet with the ripening condition to “fly” in space for a little while before we expire. When we speak of someone who is able to liberate himself or herself out of the physical realm, then the requirements to survive in space will be totally different than the needs we currently have in this material world. We must understand it in this way, and then when we hear that this world is about to explode, don’t hold any fear!

Now again, if we want to speak of the “common,” then we can say that all of us in the three worlds possess a common knowing – a clear knowing-awareness. However, we end up being “individuals” due to our own self-grasping. The reality is that all sentient beings share the same commonality; yet, it is our strong clinging to a self that separates us from others. On the day that we break

through this individuality, this selfness, or this self-graspingness, we will come to realize that all of us are equally non-discriminating.

### **1. The Pure Dharmakaya (The Absolute Body of Truth)**

From immemorial time until now, our true nature has always been pure; it has never once been defiled.

Our nature has always been pristine and brilliant like the sun and the moon. When it is covered by clouds, it cannot shine below the clouds, but it still can radiate above the clouds. It cannot penetrate the clouds to bring light to the world below. However, when the clouds are dispersed, the sun will break through to shine on all things.

There are many people who misunderstand that when we are still deluded, our true nature becomes obscured. However, if our nature can be obscured, then that is no longer our true nature. Our nature from beginningless time until now has always been pure and radiant.

It has never once been deluded. The only thing is that we have not clearly recognized this clarity and we plunge ourselves into love, hate, anger and aversion. Even though someone is crying out of despair, this person's true nature is still clearly there; it has never been deluded. Even though someone is committing a misdeed, or even though someone is performing a virtue, this person's nature continues to be his or her true nature. It is not because one commits a misdeed [versus] engaging in a virtue that his or her nature can be obscured, or because all of the [dilemma of] love, hate, anger and aversion that his nature becomes veiled. That which is veiled is [actually] our misconception. We are sinking in our deluded thinking, and therefore, we cannot take hold of our source of clear light. We cannot recognize it, nor utilize it. It simply means that we cannot utilize our nature [and that's all].

There isn't any deluded thought that can conceal our nature, because it is this nature that gives birth to our deluded thinking. Deluded thoughts are actually born from the expanse of our true nature. A deluded thought is

what suddenly arises and suddenly disappears. There isn't a single moment that we are not aware of delusion. There isn't a single moment when sadness and happiness happen that we do not know about. There isn't a single moment that we do not know about all the happenings in our bodies and our mind. We can always clearly recognize it, and even during our dreams, we would know that we are dreaming. Thus, when we are awake, how can there be such a thing as our true nature can be concealed and opaque?

The reason we use the term "deluded" is because our mind has not yet radiated. It does not yet have the capability to recognize the manifestation of our true nature in every hour, every minute and every second in this life. We mistakenly believe that whatever we see, whatever we know, and whatever we understand is all important. Thus, we allow ourselves to fall fast outwardly; we refuse to cease [our delusion], and we sink into this. Thus, at that very moment, we seemingly are obscured. Seemingly, this [obscuriation] beclouds us. The

truth is, however, all of that [obscuration] does not have enough power to shield our true nature. No matter how deluded we are, our true nature continues to be as such, and this would be the truth from countless pasts to countless futures.

When we are still confused sentient beings, and we hear that we ourselves have the Body of Truth (Dharmakaya), we dare not accept it. It is because [we believe] that our delusion is still very thick, and we need to completely remove all confusing thoughts, such as attachment, anger, ignorance, sadness, love and hatred before we can accept that we have the Amitabha true nature. We believe that if we haven't yet abolished [all of our delusions] then our true nature is still being confused and hidden. We cannot bring ourselves to believe and to accept that we have the Body of Truth (Dharmakaya) that is equanimous to the Buddhas. However, if we have such a [misunderstanding] then our true nature no longer has any value in this mundane world. Isn't our Amitabha nature luminous enough to shine through our deluded

thoughts? What kind of true nature can it be if ignorance can conceal it, and if so, then there is not much left of our true nature nor our Limitless Life and Limitless Light.

Thus, once a person already recognizes his or her Amitabha true nature, then all obscured *karma* will fall down like loads of autumn leaves. Once a person can see the truth between what is unborn and undying versus that which is born and dying, he or she will treasure it with great respect and will peacefully abide in the unborn and undying. This person will, thus, naturally, be detached from all obscured *karma* of countless times.

When we have not recognized our own true nature, then everything is on equal terms, just as a spoon made of coconut shell and a piece of Chinaware knocking against each other which means [we believe that] this delusion is virtuous and that delusion is evil. This thing can be accepted and that thing needs to be abandoned. All this kind of comparison, between accepting this versus abandoning that, is just a competition born from within our deluded consciousness. But once we recognize our

own basic nature of Amitabha, then all of the virtues and non-virtues immediately become empty. A [realized] person is allowed to still let thoughts arise, and to utilize their thoughts in whichever forms [they manifest in], but they can use their thoughts without being attached to them as before. [Still having thoughts arising] but never transgress anything in the three realms, never abandon anything, and never reject anything whether it is good or bad.

Since our true nature from the beginning is unborn and undying, thus, whatever our nature gives birth to can immediately self-dissipate. We do not need to get personally involved, and yet, it can disappear by itself. A person who can recognize his or her true Amitabha nature can clearly see this. Thus, no matter how many thoughts arose, and no matter how many afflictives of sadness, anger, love and hatred appeared during the time when we have not yet practiced (like fighting, cursing, and having a strong aversion toward each other), are those afflictives actually still here as we are sitting here right now? They were already done with at that moment in time. If at that

moment in time, our true nature did not exist, then those afflictives would remain. If they were powerful enough to veil our nature, then they would continue on until now, and we would only be able to remember sad incidents and incapable of remembering anything else. Yet, we can still remember everything else, whereas the sad incidents have already taken flight without any effort on our part. It is clear that in the past when we haven't yet practiced, we still competed [with our deluded thoughts], and we still [wrapped ourselves in] attachment, hatred, anger and in so many other things. At the moment as we are sitting here, these afflictives are no longer here; thus, we know that whatever appears on its own will vanish on its own according to its situation. There is no need for us to even raise our hands. It is because we do not have an understanding of this that we end up having to try so tiringly to practice with effort.

Let us carefully look at a rising thought to see if it would wait for us to exert effort in practice so that it can dissipate? We haven't yet put in any effort and it already



vanished, so why would we need to exert ourselves in practice, wouldn't that be overdone? Yes, truly overdone!

I really like this one story by Master Tue Trung Thuong Si. There was someone who asked him: "What is to practice?" The Master replied: "The king lowering the palanquin's thill to fight with a narrow-mouthed frog." It is a comical answer but how truly wonderful! Whoever tries to exert in practice would be just like that foolish king sitting on a beautified flower-adorned palanquin held by the respectful bearers, yet he slipped down into the dirty mud to fight with a narrow-mouthed frog. And so what's left of the king's worthiness then?

Our true nature has been Amitabha since beginningless time and our Dharmakaya has always been unborn and undying. So why is it that we have to continue to compete with our deceitful thoughts? There is clearly a mistake here. If there is someone who still thinks that the arising of conceptual thoughts can conceal one's true nature and believes that in order to recognize our nature, one needs to compete with one's thoughts, then this

person actually depreciates his or her true nature, his or her own Buddha. If one needs to quell one's deceptive thoughts in order for one's true nature to radiate, then it would be better to just stop practicing altogether, because if one could suppress these thoughts today, they will again conceal one's nature tomorrow. However, once you can recognize your own true nature, then it is completely different from these [misconceptions]. Since immemorial time until now, our true nature has always been clear, calm, luminous and peaceful; there is nothing whatsoever that can actually obscure, cling to or infect our true nature. Whether it is in hell or in paradise, true nature remains true nature.

For those of us who accepts the pure Dharmakaya, then inwardly, we respect and clearly recognize our own true nature, and outwardly, we clearly see that all beings have this [same] pure Buddha nature. Thus, we would never hold any despised thoughts toward others, we would never become arrogant thinking of ourselves higher than others, and we would never infringe or com-

pete with others. Once we realize our true nature, we will see the equanimity between ourselves and all other beings, and thus, all of this [deluded] mind will naturally dissipate without us having to exert any effort to eradicate.

The person who recognizes the pure Amitabha nature is one with exhaustive wisdom, realizing the equanimous nature between oneself and other beings and realizing that all beings behold the true nature that is unborn and undying. As such, this person would naturally develop respect for everyone. The encroaching mind to win over others, the mind of delusion, the mind of arrogance, and the conceptual thoughts . . . will naturally perish on their own.

If we once realize that all mental movements in our mind are plainly deceptive, then that in itself is enough, and there is no need for anything else. However, if we had never realized that thoughts are deceitful, then we end up having to compete with them.

Just like someone who has not recognized the gold bar, he would always dig the trash pit, yet the one who has recognized gold would utilize it at ease, and the heaps of trash would disintegrate on their own. If we utilize our lucid wisdom in everything we do, then all conceptual thoughts would be set on fire on their own—so please stop thinking that you must work to resolve these conceptual thoughts. It is because when our true Amitabha nature manifests, then it would have enough capability to see into the subtle depths of the deluded thoughts. There is no need to wait until thoughts arise to recognize them; even when they have not yet been formed, we would already detect the depths of them.

If we have not yet clearly recognized our nature, then whatever deceptive thoughts appear will become attachment or anger, and only then will we see them. However, what is special for someone who has apparently recognized the nature of Amitabha is that they are able to see deeply all the way up to the source of birth and death—the wellspring that gives rise to conceptual

thoughts when those thoughts have not yet turned into attachment or anger. One would already clearly detect them when they are still utterly subtle inwardly. One would just simply recognize them and nothing else. When these [mental movements] do not turn into deluded thoughts, then there is no more exertion in practice.

When mental movements have not yet taken forms, then our true nature itself will absorb them. Just like a mouse which crawls out of a dark cave to the outside world, it will be self-infused by the brightness that comes from the light of sunrays. The sunrays do not need to illuminate the mouse to make it bright. When we can recognize the pure Dharmakaya, then all thoughts that appear will be tinged by the radiance of our true nature. There is no more need to illuminate in order to dispose each of the deluded thoughts and no more need to maintain focus, yet the obscured thoughts will all self-dissolve due to the radiance of our true nature. Whatever appears will recognize itself and dissipate. Therefore, for anyone who cannot accept the fact that there should be no exertion in

practice, then we know that this person has not yet realized his or her true nature, because once this person has recognized his or her true nature, then he or she will know that exertion is not proper. A thousand years of exertion in practice is of no use when compared to the instant of recognizing the true nature of a realized person. That is the reality of someone who once realizes his or her own nature.

Once a person realizes his or her true Amitabha nature, then there is no need to be like this or like that, which means that this person has broken apart from all kinds of molding, yet he or she lives fully without a single transgression and never once commits errors. He or she no longer has any stereotype; there is nothing this person needs to do, and there is no fixation or imposing whatsoever before this person does anything. It is as if this person does not need to think even for a second prior to what he or she, let alone a minute, but this person never misses a beat [or being out of harmony].

For a person who has recognized the true Amitabha nature, the whole expanse of *dharmadatu* becomes unimpeded as if there is no more hell realm or paradise according to this person. The ever-present Limitless Light radiates every minute and every second without any interruption, and thus, it is called the pure Body of Truth (Dharmakaya).

Pure Dharmakaya means our body is actually the Body of Truth, of the Tathagata, and it is our true nature. Therefore, it has been primordially pure and has the capability to give birth to all phenomena.

## **2. The Perfect Sambhogakaya (the Perfect Subtle Body of Bliss)**

Dharmakaya has always been pure and serene. Sambhogakaya has always been completely perfect and lacking nothing. Therefore, if virtuous thoughts are born from this basic nature, then beings will arrive at the virtuous realm; if ill thoughts are born from this basic nature, then beings will arrive at the vicious realm. Hell realms manifest from the basic nature, and paradises also

manifest from the basic nature. Hells and paradises are complete within our own nature. A person who has recognized his or her own nature will not walk with confusion on the virtuous path nor the unrighteous path. Everything, every aspect, every condition has always been complete within this nature as this nature lacks nothing. Thus, it is called the Perfect Sambhogakaya.

Since nothing is lacking within the Perfect Sambhogakaya, everything within the three realms are also present within this Perfect Subtle Body. Therefore, in the beginning of the *Lotus Sutra*, [it is said that] the Buddha emitted a ray of light from the tuft of white hair between his eyebrows, and that this light blazed through all the one hundred thousand *koti* realms in the Eastern direction, up as high as the Akanistha Heaven and down as far as the lowest hell, Avici. [This represents] the non-biased view which is not attached to either side. This wisdom-view can deeply penetrate all realms without errors, whether it is the utmost virtuous god's realm as the Akanistha, or the heinous realm of the Avici Hell. This is actually the



wisdom-knowledge that is non-discriminating to both sides.

We need to clearly recognize all of the thoughts in our mindstream, whether virtuous, non-virtuous, clear and bright, or even the darkest of them all. Thus, having light emitted from between the eyebrows herein represents the wisdom that is not stranded by the two sides; it is the wisdom that is limpid and liberated from [the duality of] virtue and non-virtue, and it is something that has primordially been present within the true nature of all beings. Within virtue and malevolence, there are Buddhas, Bodhisattvas, Sravakas (Hearers) as well as everything else. Whatever activity is present within, our true nature would clearly know unerringly.

Sambhogakaya contains all. When the *Lotus Sutra* talks about thirty-two emanations, it says it all about this [inclusive] aspect [of Sambhogakaya]. Therefore, those who engage in the Bodhisattva activities have the essential power to enter all the different realms and perform all actions without ever separate from their true

nature. The power of true nature has all the required capabilities for the aspiring Bodhisattvas to draw upon in order to enter all realms. Thus, the Perfect Sambhogakaya is all-excellent, all-pervasive within the vast expanse of *dharmadatu*. There is not a single place in the three worlds or in the ten directions that is lacking this true nature, even in the slightest. If even the slightest of true nature is missing, then true nature is no longer true nature. True nature has always been perfectly complete and all-pervasive. The *Amitabha Sutra* talks about Limitless Life and Limitless Light, and so this is the all-pervasive light that shines upon the ten directions; there is not a single place [in all the world realms] that can be hindered or hidden from this light, and that is the Perfect Sambhogakaya. It is the clear luminosity, primordially and perfectly complete, within each of us.

### **3. The One Hundred Thousand *Koti* Nirmanakayas (the Limitless Form Body of Emanations)**

If the Buddhas have one hundred thousand *koti* Nirmanakayas, then we ourselves also have one hundred

thousand *koti* Nirmanakayas. For example, if we generate kind, compassionate thoughts toward all beings, then that means we transform ourselves into Bodhisattvas. Yet, when someone annoys us and we develop anger, then we immediately fall into the hell realm. A moment later, when we think of engaging in a virtuous action, then at that very moment, we are in the pureland. Afterward, when a greedy thought arises, then at that very moment, we enter the hungry ghost realm. When we let a deluded thought of desire and attachment arise, we will enter the path of the animals, a thought of hatred and anger the path of demi-gods, and thus, within us in every minute and every second, our mindstream manifests incessantly.

Within our own basic nature, we have all of those realms, and thus, when a thought arises, we ourselves immediately transform into that very thought. For example, when we develop anger, our face turns red and boisterous, our mind instantly turns somber, and at that very moment, hell immediately manifests. During moments of darkness, we begin to suffer, to develop unpleasantness, and mental

torments also appear. When we are annoyed or angry at someone, we ourselves open the door to the hell realm, so that we can enter and inherit everything in such a realm. It is clear that when hell realm opens up to us, we would not be able to get rid of grief, love, aversion, hatred, torment, anger and ignorance; it would be very difficult for us to break down the door of the hell realm to escape. Only when we can hear a single line of the Dharma, we have again become awakened, and only then can we leap out of the panorama of hell. Hell is a murky world, and only when [appears] the light of the Buddha's Dharma that darkness can self-dissipate, and only then can hell immediately become emptiness.

We can investigate ourselves to know where our Nirmanakayas (emanations) are leading to and what kind of inclination they have, and to know that in the future, when these Nirmanakayas gather forces, they will have enough power to pull us toward the [inclined] destination. If our Nirmanakayas lean more toward virtues, then when we leave our bodies, they will gather forces to bring us

life and death in the god's realm. Presently, if our mind generates great loving-kindness and compassion, we gain the Bodhisattva status; however, if our mind is miserly, angry and ignorant, then after we leave our bodies, we have to follow these Nirmanakayas to the lower realms.

One hundred thousand *koti* Nirmanakayas mean that within a split second, there are a myriad of countless mental thoughts that appear and a myriad of countless emanations of ours. Therefore, the force of *karma* will depend on the corresponding Nirmanakayas, and a person who has not yet realized his or her basic true nature must learn to practice by habitualization. If one has not truly realized one's own nature, then one should never let negative *karma* happen from within. If unwholesome *karma* has already taken place, then one must clearly see it, so that one would discontinue this *karma*; don't give this *karma* fertilization nor strengthen it with water to make it grow.

If we truly practice the Dharma, then we will clearly recognize this. For example, we have a very minor

adverse situation with a friend of ours, and if we don't practice well, this minute adversity can become imminent. If we continue to give fertilization and water to a malicious thought, then ill will will turn heavy and grow deep. But if, through that, an adept practitioner can sever it, then mental torments will not be generated. When a single emanated being arises [in his or her mindstream], an adept practitioner will recognize it in order to skillfully transform the one hundred thousand *koti* Nirmanakayas.

There is not a minute or a second pass by that these [Nirmanakayas] are not present within our mindstream. However, if one already recognizes Dharmakaya and Sambhogakaya, which is the same as realizing his own true nature, then all of his or her Nirmanakayas will be infused by the radiance of Dharmakaya. This is a very unique aspect. Just like a mouse crawling out of darkness to the light outside, it will be infused by the radiance of the sunrays. Although it still carries the physical body of a mouse, it is no longer pitch black as it was when it was inside the cave. It is still the same mouse, but it is now

infused with light and it is no longer the mouse in the darkness.

Within [the expanse of] true nature, all of our thoughts can be resolved by our true nature itself. It is apparent that from immeasurable time until now, it has always been like that; the only thing is that whether we have realized it or not. If we recognize this then it is as such, but if we do not recognize it, then we ourselves err in our deluded thoughts; thus, we have to endure suffering, and it is not our true nature which is doing this [or giving us suffering].

Many people have raised this question: “If our basic true nature has always been evident, then why does it still let us suffer?” It is because we allow conflicts [to take place] on winning-and-losing, on right-and-wrong, and then we suffer with them, but it is not our true nature that makes us suffering. If our sorrows and regrets cannot be dissolved nor annihilated, then they will continue to overflow in our mindstream, and we will not be able to bear a happy smile.

If we believe that the power of our basic true nature transcends all of the Nirmanakayas, then when this mind inclines toward non-virtues, it will essentially lead us to the lower hell realm; when it inclines toward virtues, then wisdom will be born, and when it generates loving-kindness and compassion, it will immediately become a Bodhisattva. Until one day, when we realize that we ourselves and another friend of ours is not different in the slightest, then at that very moment, we will come to better comprehend our true nature. Until the day when we truly realize that “I,” myself, and another friend of ours, have no differences whatsoever, then and only then, will we truly understand our own true nature!

Yet at the moment, it is impossible for us, even if we want to, to find the “equanimous sameness” within the person sitting right next to us. Isn’t that so? We see that this person’s hair is darker than ours; people on the street see us as being inferior; this person wears clothes that are far more beautiful than ours; she also wears sandals that are prettier than ours; then people on the street comment



on their beautiful clothes and sandals, and we feel agitated. Therefore, we cannot see the same equalness among each other. We cannot possibly see it. When we clearly recognize that all activities and phenomena in our lives are “equanimous,” truly “equanimous,” that it cannot possibly be distinct even if we want it to and that everything that happens in our lives is equanimously the same – then and only then will we reach a wider and deeper understanding of Buddhism.

For the time being, if we still cannot understand what it means to be equanimously the same, then it means we do not possess wisdom to understand deeply. Meanwhile, all Buddhas rely on the Dharmakaya state to peacefully abide in; they rely on equanimity to peacefully abide in. We ourselves use a house or a place or our own bodies to reside in. However, the Buddhas are different from us in this aspect. It is because the Buddhas always exist within the ever-permanent Dharmakaya state. Buddhas always exist within a realm of non-discrimination and equanimity; they rely on [those qualities] in

order to abide. That is [the state] where all of the compassionate Buddhas peacefully reside.

Thus, if someone now asks us now, “Where is Buddha Amitabha staying at the moment? Where is our historical Buddha staying at the moment?” How should we answer him or her? We would say, “Buddha Amitabha is presently residing in the Western Pureland of Ultimate Bliss,” isn’t that so? But if we answer like that, then we don’t truly understand our Buddha Amitabha.

If someone asks us where Buddha Amitabha is, then we should answer that the Buddha “is sitting right in front of all of us.” If we can answer in such a way, then hopefully our answer is correct. Let us say that “all Buddhas are sitting in the presence in front of us.” Only then can we be hopeful that we give the correct answer.

Buddhas do not reside in any place, because a Buddha does not have any private, individual field. When Buddhas become Buddhas then all realms are actually Buddhafields. It is not at all like there is one Buddha here

who possesses this specific field in order to teach beings in that region, and then there is another Buddha over there possessing another field to teach sentient beings in that region. It is not at all like that. It is only because we are so used to understanding it in such a mundane way, a way of our own. We must understand that all of the Buddhas always peacefully abide in the same unimpeded and equanimous Dharmakaya, in the *dharmadatu* of non-discrimination and non-distinction. That is the residing place of Buddhas, where Buddhas abide in peace.

#### IV. CONCLUSION

All of the Mahayana scriptures speak about the ultimate nature of truth, and within the entirety of the *dharmadatu*, there is only but one single truth. Therefore, when we study the Mahayana Sutras, we must understand one thing, and that is, this complete *dharmadatu* has one single truth that is all-pervasive. Thus, what we need to understand is that whether it is the Buddhas' realm or whichever realm it is, it remains within the expanse of *dharmadatu*. The realm of Ultimate Bliss of Buddha Amitabha also resides within the alltrue *dharmadatu*. When we speak about the all-true *dharmadatu*, there is only one, as there is only one single truth.

I pray that all of us Buddhist practitioners, whether from the tradition of Zen, Pureland or Secret Tantrayana, should practice the correct Dharma that the Buddha expounded. All of us who want the ultimate happiness of *nirvana*, including those who want to reach the Western

Pureland of Ultimate Bliss, must try at all costs to bring all root causes of suffering to cessation. If you want to bring the Buddha to mind, to think of the Buddha, then you must live with your own awakening nature. Right in your eyes, seeing is awakening; right in your nose, smelling is awakening. At all times, when we are not in a state of mistaken confusion, then we are bringing to mind and maintaining Buddha Amitabha. I pray that all of you will reach the Western Pureland of Ultimate Bliss the sooner the better to meet Buddha Amitabha face to face.



**A BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF THE MOST VENERABLE  
BHIKKHU THICH TUE HAI**

The Most Venerable **Bhikkhu Thich Tue Hai** (birthname: **Dinh Kim Nga**) was born in 1968 in Long Thoi Village, Cho Lach District, Ben Tre Province. He came from a landowner family and was the youngest of seven children. The land on which he was born was thought to be sacred, because during the war, bombings and gunfire never reached it. Thus, many people in nearby areas would escape to his family's land in search of sanctuary.

One day, following an upheaval, Bhikkhu Thich Tue Hai's father gave up his career, and his family found themselves in difficult circumstances. As two of his older brothers took to heart the meaning of impermanence, they decided to become Bhikkhus. Thereafter, his older sister also became a Bhikkuni.

Since his childhood, the Most Venerable Bhikkhu Thich Tue Hai has been very filial toward his parents. At the age of six, he already knew how to cook rice, and in order to support his family, he would follow his mother to help her sell things [at the market]. At night, he would come back home to take care of his father with much love and devotion, always serving and following his father's wish without even the slightest thought of objection. Bhikkhu Thich Tue Hai said, "I was raised over difficult circumstances ever since I was a young child; therefore, I was equipped with a strong determination to overcome arduous, challenging life situations until this very day."

His mother, on the other hand, was a peaceful, wondrous woman who was full of loving-kindness and free from discord. Bhikkhu Thich Tue Hai used to say: "It would be difficult to find another woman throughout this world with as wonderful qualities as my mother." The Bhikkhu's mother spent her entire life devoting to her family, and in 1993, she became an ordained nun,

learning and practicing the Dharma at the Tue Khong Zen Monastery.

Accompanied by great roots of virtues planted in the Buddha-Dharma, the Most Venerable Bhikkhu Thich Tue Hai, at the age of seven, became deeply moved the very first time he saw the statue of Buddha Shakyamuni. He stood immobile and entered meditative absorption in front of the statue for close to eight hours during which he was completely aware of everything that took place around him. Many people witnessed this and they did not dare to disturb Bhikkhu Thich Tue Hai until he left the meditative state himself.

In 1985, the Most Venerable Bhikkhu Thich Tue Hai fell severely ill and began to research and study the macrobiotic diet method of Sir G. Ohsawa. He followed the nutritional macrobiotic diet for just twenty-one days and reached the so-called Diet #7 empirical experience. It was the state of perfect complimentary yin-yang balance just as Sir G. Ohsawa had indicated. All illnesses, therefore, disappeared, and throughout those seven days



and nights, Bhikkhu Thich Tue Hai remained in a tranquil state of emptiness of body and mind with boundless bliss and happiness.

When he first entered 10<sup>th</sup> grade, there was one time when Bhikkhu Thich Tue Hai was walking to school while bringing to mind and reciting Buddha's name. He reached an experiential state of the mind of emptiness and tranquility; what was left in his mind was only the Buddha's name recitation at the presence, and thus, he walked for five kilometers under the rain without getting himself and his notebooks wet. When he arrived in class, to the astonishment of his teachers and friends, he finally recollected at that moment how he had walked in the rain and did not get wet.

Toward the end of his 10<sup>th</sup> grade, another strange incident occurred when Bhikkhu Thich Tue Hai rode his bicycle while reciting Buddha's name. At that time he crossed the so-called "monkey bridge" with his bicycle. This bridge was made of bamboo sticks spanning across a canal. After he arrived at the other end of the bridge, he

finally regained his consciousness, and still did not know how he could actually cross the “monkey bridge.”

In that very same year, while still a young student, Bhikkhu Thich Tue Hai was listening to his teacher give a lecture on the subject of “All things are set in motion in space” during which he suddenly realized the principle of impermanence, and therefore, began to build the determination to become ordained. It was not until the beginning of 1986 that Bhikkhu Thich Tue Hai left his household for Thuong Chieu Zen Monastery where he would begin his volunteer work and Dharma studies [to prepare for] his ordination.

On December 8, 1986, which fell on the anniversary of the Buddha’s Great Enlightenment, Bhikkhu Thich Tue Hai officially received ordination from the Grand Master Thich Thanh Tu and was given the Dharma name Thich Tue Hai (Ocean of Wisdom).

When living with the other monks in the monastery, he was assigned to toil the land and to grow vege-

tables; however, his aspiration to gain liberation from the mundane world, to resolutely transcend life-and-death and to merge with the absolute truth, continued to be his burning desire. As months and years passed by, the yearning [in his heart] grew more intensively, until one day, on July 7, 1997, as he listened to his Root Teacher, the Great Master Thich Thanh Tu, explain the Middle Way Commentaries (*Madhyamika-Sastra*),<sup>1</sup> [he heard] the following verse, “Emptiness of sensation is nirvana,” and at that very moment, immediately severed all kinds of past and present [conventional] knowledge. With his mind and body empty and clear, he thoroughly and lucidly realized that all conditions and object-appearances were no longer

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<sup>1</sup> Thien Phuc, Buddhist Dictionary (Vietnamese–English, section T): Bodhisattva Nagarjuna is attributed as the creator of the **Madhyamika-Sastra** (Trung Quán Luận in Vietnamese). According to Nagarjuna, the Middle Way is the true nature of all things which neither is born nor dies, and cannot be defined by either two extremes, existence or non-existence:

<http://www.tuvienquangduc.com.au/tudien/tdphathoc/tdphthienphucVA-tr.html>

the same physical form aggregate as he had always known. Since then, the Most Venerable Bhikkhu Thich Tue Hai fathomed the sublime teachings and no longer had any doubts regarding the words of the Buddha; he has fully comprehended the perfect truth, and from an understanding that transcends all conventions, life has become nonchalant and leisurely calm. At that very moment, he appreciatively composed a verse depicting this living force within him:

*From now on, to leisurely live with happiness and  
calmness*

*Each and every condition brightly clear and non-  
mistaken*

*Non-mistaken, unconfused, unerring*

*Simply radiant, just like that – how possible to  
express fully.*

On December 12, 1994, Bhikkhu Thich Tue Hai followed the command of his kind Root Teacher, the Great Master Thich Thanh Tu, who appointed him to become the Abbot of Long Huong Temple in Nhon Trach

District, Dong Nai Province, where he remains until the present.

Aside from propagating the Dharma to benefit beings, the Most Venerable Bhikkhu Thich Tue Hai is also a physician of traditional medicine who has cured many severe illnesses, and has advised everyone to develop a healthy balance of body and mind in order to unlock one's inner wisdom, to understand the natural order of the universe, and to gain limitless freedom, absolute impartiality, and endless bliss and happiness.

The Most Venerable Bhikkhu Thich Tue Hai has taught extensively on various major Sutras, such as the *Avatamsaka Sutra*, the *Lotus Sutra*, the *Surangama Sutra*, the *Diamond Sutra*, the *Heart Sutra*, etc., as well as on the scriptures of the Zen and Pureland traditions, and the majors Sutras of the Theravadin tradition. All scriptures depict the oneness, coherent nature of Buddhism. His greatest aspiration is for all the [diverse] traditions of Buddhism to have a unified view in accordance with the realized and liberated view as taught by Buddha: “Hun-

dreds of rivers together flow to the vast sea; as the sea has a single salty taste, my Dharma has only a single taste of liberation.”



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- Surangama Sutra
- Diamond Sutra
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- Shorter Amitabha Sutra
- Four Foundations of Mindfulness
- Four Noble Truths
- Dhammapada Sutra
- Ten Virtues Sutra
- Sixth Patriarch Sutra
- Vimalakirti Sutra
- Six Perfections
- Samantabhadra's King of Ten Vows
- Sutra of Eight Awakenings of Great Beings
- Three Doors of Liberation Sutra
- Virtues and Merits Sutra

- Devoid of Self-Appearance Sutra
- Bhaddekaratta Sutra
- Words of Wisdom of the Great Noble Being Tue Trung
- Essence of the Four Noble Truths
- The Eighteenth Aspirational Vows of Buddha Amitabha
- Four Assistant Methods
- Fourteen Points of Wisdom
- The Essence of the Diamond Sutra
- The Essence of the Sixth Patriarch Sutra
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- Meditation Relaxation and Contemplation of Body
- Impermanence—Suffering
- Dharma Questions and Answers
- Twelve Aspirational Vows of Avalokiteshvara
- The Pure Activities of the Bodhisattva Avalokiteshvara
- Buddha is the King Physician
- How to Accumulate Virtues Through the Practice of Buddha Recitation
- True Happiness
- Love and Respect
- The Dual Path of Meditation and Pureland Practice
- The Word “Practice” in Buddhism
- To Transcend Karmic Obstacles and Rebirth
- Practice and Treatment
- Mind and Body Are Not Different
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- The Eighteenth Aspirational Vow of Buddha Amitabha
- Filial Piety of a Buddhist
- To Live Peacefully and Happily and to Die Liberated



*Bodhicitta*

*The excellent and precious mind  
Where it is unborn, may it arise  
Where it is born, may it not decline  
But ever increase higher and higher*

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