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25-27 Winter Street, Brockton MA 02302 歡迎流通, 功德無量

Tel : 508-646-8168

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Essence of the Infinite Life Sutra - Venerable Master Chin Kung



EXCERPT THIRTEEN

Dharmakara heard the Buddha's discourse and saw everything shown to him. He aspired to make supreme, wondrous vows. He thoroughly contemplated^[15] what was good and bad about heavenly and human beings and what was wonderful and inferior about their lands.^[16] He single-mindedly selected what he wanted and formed his great vows. For five kalpas, he diligently sought and explored, respectfully and carefully persevered, and cultivated merits and virtues. He thoroughly understood all the merits and adornments of the twenty-one kotis^[17] of Buddha Lands as thoroughly as he understood one Buddha Land. The Buddha Land he created surpassed all Buddha Lands.

"Dharmakara heard the Buddha's discourse." "Dharmakara" was the Dharma name of Amitabha Buddha at the causal stage, when he was a bhiksu. "Heard" refers to listening to his teacher's introduction. Here "Buddha" refers to Lokeshvararaja Tathagata, Dharmakara Bodhisattva's teacher.

Dharmakara Bodhisattva told his teacher about his aspirations and asked his teacher to teach him how to fulfill them. When a student has a virtuous and great aspiration, the teacher will always wholeheartedly help the student accomplish it. Therefore, Lokeshvararaja Tathagata not only explained to Dharmakara what he wanted to know but also used extraordinary powers to display the Buddha Lands in the ten directions to him, and that allowed him to see them clearly.

At the beginning of the Visualization Sutra, a similar situation is described, which was the cause of Sakyamuni Buddha speaking the sutra. Queen Vaidehi encountered family misfortunes. Her son killed his father the king, harmed her, and usurped the throne. Having encountered such great misfortune, she became disheartened and asked Sakyamuni Buddha if there was a better and safer place where she could be reborn. Instead of directing her to one specific Buddha Land, Sakyamuni Buddha displayed all the Buddha Lands in the ten directions for her to choose from. This was the same method that Lokeshvararaja Tathagata employed for Dharmakara Bodhisattva.

Queen Vaidehi chose Amitabha Buddha's Western Pure Land. And then Sakyamuni Buddha taught her the method to attain rebirth in the Land of Ultimate Bliss. This is essentially the content of the Visualization Sutra.

Lokeshvararaja Tathagata displayed all the Buddha Lands in the ten directions to Dharmakara Bodhisattva. After seeing all these, he "aspired to make supreme, wondrous vows. He thoroughly contemplated what was good and bad about their heavenly and human beings and what was wonderful and inferior about the lands." "Their" refers to all the Buddha Lands in the Ten Directions. In the Six Paths in all Buddha Lands there were good and bad beings. This is talking about the living environment, which involves living beings and situations.

The Land of Ultimate Bliss did not come from Amitabha Buddha's baseless imagination or dreams. He truly saw many Buddha Lands, and they all differed vastly from one another. Some lands were very wonderful, and others had many shortcomings. "What was wonderful and inferior about those lands" refers to the material environment [which involves inanimate things]. "Inferior" refers to a very bad environment. "Wonderful" refers to a very good and beautiful environment. The environment of every being is different. The causes every being creates are different and result in different effects [environments]. Dharmakara Bodhisattva understood the principles and truths.

"He thoroughly contemplated. . . . He single-mindedly selected what he wanted and formed his great vows." How was the Western Pure Land created? Dharmakara Bodhisattva visited various Buddha Lands and adopted their strengths and rejected their shortcomings. In other words, the Land of Ultimate Bliss is an amalgamation of the excellent qualities of all the Buddha Lands.

He saw that all the Buddha Lands in the ten directions had Six Paths, and the suffering was tremendously intense, especially in the Three Evil Paths. Thus he wanted his first vow to be that there would be no Three Evil Paths in the land he would create. This is how this great vow came to be.

The Chinese often say, "Read ten thousand books, travel ten thousand miles." Listening to lectures on the sutras is like reading books, and seeing all the Buddha Lands is like traveling ten thousand miles. Because he heard with his own ears and saw with his own eyes, Dharmakara Bodhisattva's knowledge and wisdom were true. He had

such abundant knowledge and experience that he was able, by selection, to create his own land. This was how the Land of Ultimate Bliss came about.

The causes and conditions for how the Land of Ultimate Bliss came about were different from those for the other Buddha Lands. The causes and conditions for the latter were complicated and not simple: good ones and bad ones were mixed together. In the Western Pure Land, Dharmakara chose only pure and virtuous dharmas. His purpose was to provide a wonderful learning and practice environment for the beings from all the Buddha Lands in the ten directions who truly generate the great mind and who aspire to [understand and] transcend the cycle of birth and death, and attain Buddhahood in one lifetime. He wanted to provide the best learning and living environment.

“For five kalpas, he diligently sought and explored, respectfully and carefully persevered, and cultivated merits and virtues.”

The words “sought and explored” mean that one needs to clearly recognize and understand the virtuous dharmas and the bad dharmas, and the good and bad retributions. And then one needs to end all wrongdoings and to cultivate all virtues.

The words “respectfully and carefully persevered” mean that one needs to be respectful when interacting with people and engaging in tasks. A respectful mind is the true mind. In addition to being respectful, one needs to carefully persevere, so that one will not lose what one has learned and practiced.

The word “cultivated” means correcting one’s faults and applying one’s learning to life.

“Five kalpas” is the time Dharmakara spent cultivating and forming vows. There are several ways to measure kalpas. “Increasing and decreasing kalpas” is the one that is most often heard of. Sakyamuni Buddha said that in the Saha world, the shortest life span of humans averages about ten years. At this point, the suffering in this Saha world is tremendously intense. Every one hundred years, the life span increases by one year, until the life span reaches eighty-four thousand years. Then subsequently, every one hundred years, the life span decreases by one year until the life span is again down to ten years. One cycle of an increasing and a decreasing life span is a small kalpa. Twenty small kalpas make up one medium kalpa. Four medium kalpas make up one great kalpa. The kalpas mentioned in the Mahayana sutras refer to great kalpas.

Dharmakara Bhikshu spent such a long time cultivating that he was able to truly take in all the strengths of all the Buddha Lands and reject the shortcomings.

“He thoroughly understood all the merits and adornments of the twenty-one kotis of Buddha Lands as thoroughly as he understood one Buddha Land. The Buddha Land he created surpassed all Buddha Lands.”

“Twenty-one” is not an actual number. It represents perfection. For example, in the Amitabha Sutra, the number seven represents perfection. It signifies the four directions, the zenith, the nadir, and center. In the Avatamsaka

Sutra, ten is used to represent perfection. Counting from one to ten, ten is a complete and perfect number. Ten tens is one hundred, also a complete number.

Tibetan Buddhism uses sixteen and twenty-one to represent perfection.

“The Buddha Land he created surpassed all Buddha Lands.” “The Buddha Land he created” refers to the Land of Ultimate Bliss that he established. “All Buddha Lands” refers to the twenty-one kotis of Buddha Lands. The Western Pure Land is an amalgamation of the wonderful strengths of all the Buddha Lands. It has all the strengths of the Buddha Lands and is free of all the shortcomings. Naturally, it surpasses all these Buddha Lands and fulfills Dharmakara’s great vows. This sentence from the excerpt is saying that the Land of Ultimate Bliss has been created.

The prerequisite for rebirth in the Western Pure Land is a pure mind. When the mind is pure, the land will be pure. The Buddha taught us to cultivate a pure mind with “belief, vow, and practice.” True belief, sincerely vowing, and single-mindedly chanting “Amitufo” will help us suppress wandering thoughts, discriminations, and attachments. In doing so, we will meet the initial standards for purity and be reborn [in the Pure Land] in the Land Where Sages and Ordinary Beings Dwell Together.

[15] Contemplated also means understood.—Trans.

[16] All the Buddha Lands in the ten directions.—Trans.

[17] The edge, the highest point. As a numeral, ko i means one hundred thousand, one million, or ten million.—
<http://www.sutrasmantras.info/glossary.html#koti>

Web link to the article: <http://www.purelandcollege.org.au/page66.html>

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