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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 SIXTEEN

He planted numerous roots of virtue and did not mind [his] varied sufferings. He had few desires and was content. He pursued only white dharmas<sup>[18]</sup> and brought benefits to all beings. He was tireless in pursuing his aspirations and vows, achieving results through the power of patience. He constantly harbored compassion and patience for all sentient beings. With a kind expression and caring words, he advised, taught, urged, and encouraged them. He was respectful to the Three Jewels and attended to his teachers without any insincerity or flattery in his heart. All of his conduct was magnificent, and he was a role model in every way. He regarded all dharmas as illusory and remained in the samadhi that is eternally quiescent. He guarded well his verbal karmas and did not ridicule others' faults. He guarded well his bodily karmas and did not transgress any precept or codes of behavior. He guarded well his mental karmas and kept himself pure and uncontaminated.

The words "planted numerous roots of virtue" mean to accumulate merits and virtues. "Roots" are the foundation; they can give rise to myriad virtues. That which can give rise to something is the root. The root of virtue for the Pure Land school is this phrase: Homage to Amitabha Buddha. When one focuses on and practices only the Pure Land method, one continuously and mindfully chants the Buddha-name. This method will help us to keep our minds in an unperturbed and

tranquil state from within (where no affliction arises) and not be attached to any phenomena from without. Actually, all of the eighty-four thousand Dharma doors aim to achieve this state.

Of all the methods, the Buddha-name chanting method is the most convenient and the easiest in which to succeed. When one mindfully chants the Buddha-name, one's cultivation will be enhanced by the supportive powers of Amitabha Buddha and all other Buddhas in the ten directions. This is why all the other methods cannot compare with this one.

The words "did not mind [his] varied sufferings" mean that Dharmakara did not mind any of the sufferings he underwent: he accepted them peacefully. Sufferings are brought about by the evil deeds committed in the present and past lifetimes. When we understand the causes of the sufferings, we will willingly undergo them and not blame others.

How should we live our lives? We should let go of any situation or condition, whether favorable or adverse, and just concentrate on chanting the Buddha-name.

Dharmakara "had few desires and was content." When one has few desires and is content, one's afflictions will be reduced. Every day, it is enough for one to have a full stomach, adequate clothing, and a place to shield one from wind and rain. A content person is often happy. When one is content, one will want few things. The less one wants, the more at ease and the happier one is. If one truly does not compete with others or crave anything, one will be happier than a celestial being.

When one has meditative concentration, one will keep the mind in an unperturbed and tranquil state from within and not be attached to any phenomena from without.

Every aspect in one's life should be simple. Simplicity leads to a long life. The ancient Chinese often said, "Illness enters through the mouth." Nowadays, many people contract strange illnesses, which come mostly from the food consumed. In the past in China, there were people in the countryside who maintained a simple diet, but they were healthy and lived a long life. This proves that the simpler the food, the healthier one is.

A pure mind with no wandering thoughts, a regular routine, a simple diet, few desires, and contentment—these are the essentials for good health.

"He pursued only white dharmas." Black signifies bad, and white signifies good. Ancient Indians used black and white, and the Chinese used bad and good. Pursuing only white dharmas means pursuing only wholesome dharmas; that is, single-mindedly seeking goodness.

What are wholesome dharmas? And what are unwholesome dharmas? The Buddha said that anything that benefits oneself is unwholesome and that anything that benefits all beings is wholesome. Why is benefiting oneself bad?

One transmigrates within the Three Realms and the Six Paths because of ego-attachment. In other words, when one's every thought is of oneself and for oneself, then one will transmigrate within the Six Paths. Arhats transcend the Six Paths by eradicating ego-attachment. When ego-attachment is eradicated, there is no more transmigration.

When dharmas-attachment is eradicated, the Ten Dharma Realms no longer exist. At this point, one has enlightened the mind and seen the true nature. Dharmas-attachment is hindrance arising from the attachment to our knowledge. Ego-attachment is hindrance arising from our afflictions. When one has ego-attachment, one has affliction. When one has dharmas-attachment, one has ignorance. Therefore, when one eradicates ego-attachment, one transcends the cycle of birth and death.

If our every thought is of ourselves, ego-attachment will worsen day by day. How then can we transcend the Three Realms? This is why the Buddha taught us to always think of benefiting all beings. This way, the thoughts of benefiting ourselves will

gradually diminish and go away. Our every thought and every deed should be for all beings, not for ourselves. When all beings have good fortune, we too have good fortune, because we are also one of the beings. Similarly, we cannot avoid misfortune if all beings have misfortune.

Having all beings in one's every thought and wholeheartedly helping them is "pursuing only white dharmas." It is also "bringing benefits to all beings." "Bringing" means giving. Benefiting living beings is sacrificing oneself to benefit others.

"He was tireless in pursuing his aspirations and vows." We seek wholesome dharmas, sacrifice ourselves to benefit others, and serve them tirelessly and diligently. If we are healthy and have a long life, then this is good fortune for all beings.<sup>[19]</sup> If we have a short life, then this is misfortune for all beings. Our physical body has no relevance to our self. It also has no relevance in any of our gains or losses, our benefit or harm. Our body is only a tool used to benefit all beings. This is the attainment of great freedom! When we complete a meritorious deed, the merit is not ours. When we fail, it is not our fault. With no merit or fault and with the benefit belonging to all beings, we will be tireless in accomplishing our aspirations and vows.

The words "achieving results through the power of patience" mean accomplishing the paramita of patience, one of the Six Paramitas that bodhisattvas practice. One can be patient even when it is difficult to do so. Of course, one also needs to have true wisdom. When one has true wisdom, one will know how to benefit all beings. Although accomplishing a meritorious deed requires certain opportunities and conditions, procedures, and sequential order, one still must have patience to accomplish it. As the Diamond Sutra says: "All accomplishments are attributed to patience." Of the Six Paramitas, which are practiced by bodhisattvas, the paramita of patience is crucial to one's success or failure.

"He constantly harbored compassion and patience for all sentient beings." "All sentient beings" refers to all beings, in particular those beings who are suffering, who have committed evil karmas, and who are deluded. We should always treat them with empathy. This sentence teaches us that when interacting with people and engaging in tasks, we should do so with the mindset of compassion and tolerance.

"With a kind expression and caring words" describes the demeanor in which one presents oneself: with a pleasant expression and gentle manner. "Caring words" does not refer to pleasant words but to words that come from love and the wish to protect. These words can benefit people and help them break through delusion and attain awakening.

In the sutras, all the words spoken by the Buddha are caring words. Even a scolding or a reprimand are caring words if the words truly benefit someone. Why bother to reproach or discipline someone, if we don't truly care about that person?

"He advised, taught, urged, and encouraged them." This is using expedient means to encourage people and help them make progress.

The following examples are all wholesome dharmas, the true source of all happiness.

"He was respectful to the Three Jewels and attended to his teachers." The mention of the Three Jewels here is not just a reference to the Three Jewels of the Three Refuges: it means we need to dwell in and uphold the Three Jewels. The emphasis of the Three Refuges is the Three Jewels of True Nature—awakening, correct understanding, and purity, which are our true refuges.

The Three Jewels in our true nature are awakening, correct understanding, and purity. The Buddha signifies the awakening of our true nature, the Dharma signifies the correct understanding of our true nature, and the Sangha signifies the purity of our true nature. We should be respectful to them. Every day, in our every thought we should ask ourselves if we are

awakened? Do we have correct understanding? Are our thoughts and views correct? Are our minds pure? The purpose of dwelling in and upholding the Three Jewels is to constantly remind us of the Three Jewels of True Nature.

We receive the Buddha's teaching and take him as our teacher. There are two meanings in our making offerings to a Buddha image. The first is to remember and appreciate where we come from, and to never forget. The second is to remind us of the awakening of the true nature. What does the Buddha signify? To be awakened, not deluded. From morning till night, are we awakened or not when interacting with people, engaging in tasks, and handling objects? A Buddha image constantly reminds us to be awakened, not deluded; to maintain a pure mind, one beyond pollution; and to have correct thoughts and views at all times, in all places, and in all situations, whether favorable or adverse. This is being "respectful to the Three Jewels."

"Attended to his teachers" is respecting one's teachers and their teachings. Like Confucianism, Buddhism is also founded on filial piety to one's parents and respect for one's teachers. Confucian teaching flourished because of this foundation, as did the Buddha's teaching. Filial piety is thus very important, for only when one is filial will one respect teachers. If one truly respects one's teachers, one will receive the Way taught by the teachers. If one does not respect one's teachers, they will not be able to teach one anything no matter how good they are. Why? Because one will not believe them nor be willing to learn from them. When one respects one's teachers, one will listen to their teaching and diligently practice accordingly, thus receiving merits and benefits. Respecting one's teachers is respecting the Way and receiving it.

The words "without any insincerity or flattery in his heart" teaches us to not only treat the Three Jewels and teachers with sincerity, but also all beings. We should cultivate this habit in daily life.

"All of his conduct was magnificent and he was a role model in every way." The word "magnificent" conveys the "truth, goodness, and beauty" that ordinary people often speak of. But such "truth, goodness, and beauty" exists as a concept, not a reality. On the other hand, truth, goodness, beauty, and wisdom truly exist in the Western Pure Land.

When we abide by the Buddha's teachings, and interact with people and handle matters with a sincere, respectful, pure and great compassionate heart, our minds and conduct will be "magnificent." So, when we mindfully chant "Amitufo," we must take Amitabha Buddha's causal vows as our causal vows.

Dharmakara "was a role model in every way." He was a role model not only for practitioners but also for the general public. The meaning of these words is infinitely profound and broad.

Whatever our occupation or status in society, we should set a good example for everyone, especially our peers. In the chapter "Sudhana's Visits to Fifty-three Wise Teachers" in the Avatamsaka Sutra, of the fifty-three bodhisattvas, five appeared as monastics and the others as men and women of all ages and all walks of life. Their behavior set good examples for society.

Bodhisattvas not only teach by words. Their every action is also a good example for others. This shows the bodhisattvas' great compassion. Only by doing so can they change prevailing habits and customs for the better, and encourage and reform people. To encourage and reform people, one teaches not only by words: one's every action and thought should also be for the benefit of them. If a lay practitioner, regardless of his or her occupation, works for the benefit of society and all beings, he or she is a bodhisattva, a role model.

"He regarded all dharmas as illusory and remained in the samadhi that is eternally quiescent." This sentence describes Dharmakara's inner state. All phenomena, whether mundane or supramundane, are illusory. As the Diamond Sutra says: "All conditioned existences are like a dream, an illusion, a bubble, or a shadow." Why take them seriously?

“Samadhi” is a Sanskrit word. The Chinese translation is “proper enjoyment.” The “proper enjoyment” of bodhisattvas is purity, quiescence, and Nirvana. Purity, quiescence, and Nirvana are the enjoyment of Buddhas and Mahasattvas. Lay bodhisattvas can also enjoy them.

Some practitioners have built up large businesses. They tell me, “Master, I am in great suffering. Employees do not follow my orders and it is hard to do business. I have a lot to worry about every day.” Actually, what is there to worry about? The Buddha taught us to “regard all dharmas as illusory and remain in the samadhi that is eternally quiescent.” If we truly practice this, we will lead a very happy and very free life! How then can there be suffering?

There are many entrepreneurs who learn Buddhism. But their learning is not thorough enough. They do not thoroughly understand the principles taught by the Buddha. If they truly understood, their situations would be different.

In Chinese history, the prosperity in the early years of the Qing dynasty was unprecedented. The flourishing age during the rule of Emperors Kangxi, Yongzheng, and Qianlong lasted for more than one hundred and fifty years. During these years, each emperor would lead all the government officials and military officers in chanting the Infinite Life Sutra every day at the imperial court. They abided by the Buddha’s teachings and practiced accordingly.

If the owner and the employees of a company know the wondrous benefit of doing this, and they chant a sutra for fifteen to twenty minutes every morning, then they are abiding by the Buddha’s teachings. They are the Buddha’s students, and they are practicing accordingly. So how can the company not flourish? Doing this is establishing consensus based on the Buddha’s teaching.

It requires wisdom to “regard all dharmas as illusory.” When one understands the truth of everything, it will be easy to handle matters without making any mistake. Because one does not understand the truth, wrong steps are taken and one ends up making mistakes.

“He guarded well his verbal karmas and did not ridicule other’s faults.” This describes Dharmakara’s external behavior. The sentence “He regarded all dharmas as illusory and remained in the samadhi that is eternally quiescent” describes his attainment and wisdom. “Regarding all dharmas as illusory” is wisdom. “Remaining in the samadhi that is eternally quiescent” is meditative concentration.

When one truly has meditative concentration and wisdom, one’s external behavior will reflect that—“he guarded well his verbal karmas and did not ridicule other’s faults.” When seeing the faults of others, one does not talk about them.

The Platform Sutra says: “If one is a true practitioner, one will not see the faults of others.” Why will one not see the faults of others? Because one regards all dharmas as illusory! There is no fault. There is no merit. There is no good and no evil. One’s mind is impartial: without discrimination or attachment, there is neither good nor evil, neither right nor wrong, and neither true nor false. One will naturally not speak of the faults of others. Therefore, good or evil, right or wrong, and true or false—these are unfounded discriminations formed by people in this world.

“He guarded well his bodily karmas and did not transgress any precept or codes of behavior.” Simply put, one’s demeanor and behavior naturally conform with proper customs: there will be no lack of courtesy; there will be no wrongdoing.

“He guarded well his mental karmas and kept himself pure and uncontaminated.” Of the three kinds of karmas, the hardest to guard is one’s mental karmas, and the easiest bad karmas to commit are verbal karmas. This is why verbal karma is listed first.

In the title of this sutra are the words “purity, impartiality, and enlightenment.” Purity, impartiality, and enlightenment are one in three and three in one. When the mind is pure, it is also impartial. Since it is pure, it must also be enlightened. When the pure mind is functioning, that is enlightenment. An enlightened mind is definitely pure and impartial.

In learning Buddhism, one needs only to cultivate a pure mind. When one has a pure mind, one will naturally be impartial and enlightened. At all times, in all places, and in all situations, whether favorable or adverse, one needs to maintain a pure and uncontaminated mind.

The mind will naturally be pure when (1) internally, greed, anger, ignorance, and arrogance do not arise in one, and (2) externally, one is not attached to any environment, good or bad. A pure mind is the true mind and is true wisdom. When handling any situation, one will do it correctly and completely, without any mistakes. All mistakes arise from desire and thoughts of gain and loss.

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[18] White dharmas mean wholesome dharmas.—Trans.

[19] By having a longer life we have more time to help more beings. With a shorter life, we have less time to help beings.—Trans.

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