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The Path to Buddhahood

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The teachings in the *Flower Adornment Sutra* are in accordance with the level of understanding of people today and are suitable to our current conditions. Although people are creating heavy negative karma, they possess deep and great roots of virtues and merits. It is a pity that these beings have not had the good conditions to bring about the germination of their virtuous roots and merits. With a change of thought, they would uncover the Mahayana's perfect root nature. Without such a change, then as the ancients said: "We will get the result that we are destined to get (as we have not yet encountered good conditions)." With such a change in thought, we will immediately break through delusion, become awakened, and be transformed from an ordinary being into a sage. As Master Shan-Dao said, a person's achievement depends on the conditions he or she encounters. Thus, encountering the right conditions is crucial in determining whether we attain results in our cultivation.

However, an ordinary being is simply that, an ordinary being. Even if we were to listen to the Buddha's teachings for hundreds or thousands of times, it would still be difficult for us to reform. Buddha Shakyamuni taught daily for forty-nine years, he lectured for tens and hundreds of thousand of times to "wake" us up. If we will turn back from our erroneous behavior, then the Buddha's goal of eradicating our suffering will be achieved.

Have we lost our chance to encounter the right conditions now that the Buddha is no longer with us? No, the question is - do we know how to hold on to the right condition when we encounter one?

At eighty-six years old, the former president of the Singapore Buddhist Lodge, Mr. Guang Bie Chen, who was recently been reborn into the Pure Land, did not ignore the right condition when he encountered it.

A few years before he died, his poor health forced him to stop working and to remain at home. During this period, Mr. Bock Guan Lee gave him videotapes of my lectures on Buddhism. Mr. Chen listened to these lectures eight hours daily for four years. He had met a wonderful opportunity and made good use of it. He succeeded after four years, attained the state of One Mind Undisturbed and knew three months in advance the day he would die.

Two years ago, he saw Buddha Amitabha and requested to leave for the Pure Land. However, Mr. Lee said that probably Buddha Amitabha advised Mr. Chen to wait another two years to take care of the Buddhist Lodge until the election for the next committee was over.

I was there the day he attended the election seated in his wheelchair. A few months later, Mr. Chen left this world. This shows that conditions depend on us. The late president of the Lodge had the wonderful opportunity to obtain the videotapes of all my lectures. If our conditions are not as good as his were it does not matter. If we can only obtain one videotape and listen to it eight hours a day for four years, we are assured of surpassing him in our merits.

This kind of prolonged cultivation on one single subject encompasses the Three Learnings of self-discipline, deep concentration, and wisdom, and assures us success in our practice. Thus, if we do not succeed, we cannot blame others, our bad luck, or the lack of good teachers or classmates; all these are just excuses to shift our responsibility. True practitioners understand that we ourselves are to blame; others and our environment are without fault, but rather we let the opportunity pass us by.

About fifteen years ago, when I lectured in Los Angeles, I met a retired university professor, Mr. Li-Ben Zhao. After his retirement, Mr. Zhao had opened a restaurant with a friend. He heard my lectures and was very happy to learn the teachings. He brought home audiotapes of the lectures on the *Platform Sutra* and the *Diamond Sutra* and listened to these for twenty-six times. Mr. Zhao asked me if his approach of sutra study, of simply listening to these two sets of lectures, could help him be born into the Pure Land when he chanted Buddha Amitabha's name and vowed to be born there.

I assured him it would, but that twenty-six times was not enough, that he needed to listen at least one hundred times. When he had done so, he came to me again and I told him to listen for another one hundred times. Now, Mr. Zhao lectures very well on these two sutras and receives many invitations to give lectures. It really is possible. If we can become very familiar with the teachings, then they eventually will become part of us and will come from within us.

It is good if we know this method of concentrated cultivation for it contains each of the Three Learnings. Practicing according to the teachings is *self-discipline*; when our minds are settled and focused on learning one method of cultivation, we will have *deep concentration* and with deep concentration, we will uncover our *innate wisdom*.

Why is it that most people cannot uncover this wisdom? It is because our minds are too cluttered. If we can concentrate deeply, we will uncover wisdom with new awakening and understanding each time we listen to the lectures. Accumulating small awakenings leads to complete enlightenment. When we dedicate this merit to be born into the Pure Land, we are assured of being born there. This is stated in the last section about the three levels of rebirth into the Pure Land of the *Infinite Life Sutra*.

Master Ci-Zhou (who wrote the study outline of the thirty-seven chapter version of the *Infinite Life Sutra*) said that it does not matter whether the sutra we choose to learn is one of the Pure Land sutras or not, as long as it is one of the Mahayana sutras. If we dedicate the merits from our learning to being born into the Pure Land, we are

assured of attaining our goal. There have been practitioners who succeeded in this way and they are good examples for us.

With our advanced technology, it is easy for us to use a cassette player and listen to audiotapes of one or two series of sutras. There is no reason why we cannot succeed in our practice. If we truly practice, everything we do will be in accordance with each of the Six Paramitas for to practice one Paramita is to practice all Paramitas. This is the way Bodhisattvas practice.

We need to understand these principles to know how we should practice. Those who succeeded are those who practiced patience. The Buddha taught us that everything is obtained through patience. If we patiently and persistently listen to the Buddhist teachings and correct our faults everyday, follow the teachings in the sutras on what should or should not be done and repeatedly engrave them in our memory, we will be able to immediately perceive a rising thought and detect whether or not it is proper during our daily interaction with others and circumstances. If the thought is improper, we should correct it instantly; this is true cultivation. We no longer follow our afflictions and bad habits, but instead accord with the teachings of the Buddha. In this way, we are assured of success in our practice.

In the *Infinite Life Sutra*, the Buddha said that this kind of practitioner is the Buddha's best student, for he or she abides by the Buddha's teachings, studies the sutra, and is a good example for all. If we truly understand what the Buddha told us, we will accept his teachings wholeheartedly; if we have yet to accept his teachings, it simply means that we have not truly understood them. Why are we unable to understand the intrinsic meanings? It is because we have not read the sutra enough. The ancients said that we would naturally understand the meaning in a book if we read it one thousand times.

This principle can also be applied to listening to teachings. One who listens to the lectures for one or two thousand times, will naturally attain awakening. When the number of times we immerse ourselves in the teachings is insufficient, we will be unable to overcome our afflictions. Focus on one subject, for that will block the distractions that keep us from entering the door to awakening.

To listen or read the sutras with concentration is to practice all Three Learnings at one time. If we listen to too many different types of teachings, then all that we gain is knowledge. This will not qualify us to teach others. The secret in obtaining deep concentration and in uncovering wisdom lies in choosing one method of cultivation and studying it for a prolonged time. With deep concentration, our wandering thoughts and afflictions will lessen as our wisdom increases proportionately. Whereas in the past, we were confused and disorganized, now we are intelligent and clear about everyone and everything. This indicates that we have increased deep concentration. In the past, we used to make mistakes, now we no longer do so. This is a sign of deep concentration and wisdom.

To be able to overcome our afflictions accumulated from incalculable lifetimes, to transform afflictions into wisdom, evil to good, delusion to awakening, and from being ordinary to a sage, we must use great efforts in our practice. Everyone can achieve this goal so long as we know how; it has nothing to do with our lifestyles or jobs.

Do not mistakenly think that your job makes it too difficult to cultivate or that another job lends itself more easily to cultivation. The key lies in whether we know the proper way to succeed. If we do not know the right method, then even if we were to become monks or nuns, chant the Buddha's name and meditate all day in the cultivation hall, we will still never be able to achieve the way in our practice.

The Three Learnings and Six Paramitas can be achieved all at one time in our daily lives, whether eating, dressing or doing anything else, all activities can completely encompass the Six Paramitas. This is the state of "one is all, all is one" that was taught in the *Flower Adornment Sutra*. Any cultivation method encompasses infinite cultivation methods and contains the complete Paramitas and infinite teachings within each. Thus, if one method works, all methods work. We need to listen to the Mahayana teachings more often so that we can break through our wandering discriminatory thoughts and attachments. This will reduce our misunderstandings and obstacles in our path of cultivation.

Today, although this lecture is only ninety minutes long, we can still benefit from it if we grasp the important points on how to cultivate, and make use of today's technology to keep listening to the lectures. We are much more fortunate than our ancestors were because we are able to listen to a lecture repeatedly until we thoroughly understand it. Listening to the lecture many times will enable us to truly understand the way to attain Buddhahood.

Boston Amita Buddhism Society new website: <http://www.amtb-ma.org/>

Group Buddha Recitation Every Saturday 9:30am

For details please call ABS (857)998-0169 or email to amtb.ma@gmail.com