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## Essence of the Infinite Life Sutra - Venerable Master Chin Kung



### EXCERPT EIGHTEEN

Brings forth the bodhi mind, observes all the precepts, firmly abides in them without any transgression, brings abundant benefits to sentient beings, and offers them all the good roots that one has cultivated to help them attain peace and happiness.

This excerpt sets the standard, throughout our lives, for interacting with people and engaging in tasks. "Bodhi" is Sanskrit, meaning "enlightenment." "Bringing forth the bodhi mind" means bringing forth the mind to attain enlightenment and be free of confusion and delusion. An ordinary being is called an ordinary being because such a person is confused and deluded.

The excerpt also teaches us to interact with people and engage in tasks with a sincere mind. We should not deceive them or act falsely. Sincerity is the bodhi mind. The Visualization Sutra talks about "a mind of the utmost sincerity." This is the noumenon of the bodhi mind.

How can one be truly free of confusion or delusion? Let us observe a truly awakened person. This person has a clear understanding of him- or herself as well as the living environment. Understanding is awakening. What is the standard for understanding?

The Buddha was a truly awakened person. He is our standard. The Buddha said that the truth of this world is

“suffering, emptiness, and impermanence.” This is the truth of this mundane world. No one can escape from this. This world is filled with suffering, is empty in nature, and is impermanent. We must clearly understand this. When we do, we should abandon “suffering, emptiness, and impermanence” in this world and seek the state of “permanence, joy, true self, and purity.” Achieving this, we are truly awakened. The state of “permanence, joy, true self, and purity” is the state of Buddhas and bodhisattvas.

Buddhism talks about “understanding the cycle of birth and death and transcending the Three Realms.” When one clearly understands the truth of life and death and of transmigration within the Six Paths, one is an awakened person. When one understands the truth, the next step is transcending the Six Paths and freeing oneself from samsara. This is what Buddhas and bodhisattvas do.

When one is clear about the truth, how should one cultivate? When the Buddha was in this world, which was during the Dharma-perfect Age, people had high capacities and the majority could succeed in any method that they chose to practice! After the Buddha’s time, during the Dharma-semblance Age, people did not have as high a capacity as earlier. With that, the quality of the Buddha’s teachings gradually deteriorated as they were passed down. But it was not that the sutras had degenerated; rather, it was the lecturers’ interpretation of the sutras that had worsened. As time went by, the lectures on the Dharma became more and more incorrect. Now it is the Dharma-ending Age, more than three thousand years after the Buddha’s parinirvana. The deterioration has reached a point where we do not know what to do. It gets more and more difficult for us to attain realization from learning and practicing Buddhism.

Three thousand years ago, the Buddha knew completely what was going to happen in society today! He did not fail those of us who truly sought transcendence, who truly sought enlightenment. The Buddha, in the Great Collection Sutra, said that in the Dharma-perfect Age, one could succeed in cultivation by observing the precepts; in the Dharma-semblance Age, one could succeed in cultivation by practicing meditative concentration; and in the Dharma-ending Age, one could succeed in cultivation by learning the Pure Land method. The Buddha was telling us, the people of today, that we will definitely succeed in our cultivation if we learn and practice the Pure Land method.

The Dharma-ending age lasts ten thousand years. One thousand years have passed, and there are nine thousand years to go. The Infinite Life Sutra says that at the end of that nine thousand years, the Dharma will be lost[23] to our mundane world. The Infinite Life Sutra, however, will remain in this world for another one hundred years. At the end of that one hundred years, even the Infinite Life Sutra will also be lost to the world. But there will still exist the six syllables “Namo Amitufo.”

From this we can see the inconceivable merit of “Namo Amitufo.” The people who live after the Dharma-ending Age will be able to attain liberation by relying on “Namo Amitufo.” Today, we have a better chance.

Great Master Daochuo of the Tang dynasty was a patriarch of the Pure Land school. During his lifetime, he lectured only on the three Pure Land sutras, and he did so more than two hundred times. From this we can see that practicing and propagating only one Dharma door is the perfect bodhi mind.

To understand the cycle of birth and death, one must first know that life is filled with suffering, and that the suffering in future lifetimes will become even worse than in the current lifetime. If one does not want to be reborn in the human path, can this wish be fulfilled? Unless one mindfully chants the Buddha-name and seeks rebirth in

the Western Pure Land, one's wish may not be fulfilled. Therefore, one must be determined to attain rebirth there in this lifetime. This is the true bodhi mind.

When one has an awakened mind, one's behavior also needs to be awakened. In other words, one should lead the life of an awakened person. In daily life, when one interacts with people and engages in tasks, one's every thought should be awakened, not deluded. The following sutra text is the Buddha's teaching of the correct activities and practice for the bodhisattvas in this world.

In "...observe all the precepts, firmly abide in them without any transgression," the meaning of observing the precepts, in a broad sense, is abiding by laws and the codes of behavior.

The spirit of the precepts is "do nothing that is bad and do everything that is good." "Do nothing that is bad" is the spirit of the Theravada precepts. "Do everything that is good" is the spirit of the bodhisattva precepts.

There are various levels for good and bad. For example, in the Five Vehicles of Buddhism, there are five levels: the human vehicle, the heavenly vehicle, the sound-hearer vehicle, the pratyekabuddha vehicle, and the bodhisattva vehicle. The humans and heavenly beings are still within the Three Realms and have not yet transcended the cycle of rebirth. The sound-hearers and the pratyekabuddhas have truly transcended transmigration within the Six Paths.

The perfect Dharma, however, is founded on being a good human being. If one is not a good person, how can one become a Buddha? Where should one start with learning Buddhism? One starts with learning to be a good person.

The Visualization Sutra teaches the Three Conditions. The first condition includes being filial to and providing and caring for parents, being respectful to and serving teachers, being compassionate and not killing any living beings, and cultivating the Ten Virtuous Karmas. This first condition is the basis for being a good person.

The Five Precepts are the fundamental precepts, which Buddhas and bodhisattvas also abide in. When we expand the scope of the precepts, we have laws. All the laws, moral values, and customs of our countries should be followed. They are all within the scope of the precepts. In addition, we should control our sensual desires. We should firmly abide by the precepts and not transgress them.

This is "do nothing that is bad," the spirit of the Theravada precepts.

"Brings abundant benefits to sentient beings" describes a Mahayana precept. "Sentient beings" encompasses not only people but also animals and plants. "Abundant benefits" refers to not just the most abundant but also the highest benefits.

We should do our best to perform deeds that will benefit others. Maybe there is a limit to what we can do, but if we perform deeds with a sincere, respectful, and pure mind and with patience, we will have the support of Buddhas and bodhisattvas. Our wishes will surely be fulfilled.

The Buddha said: "All dharmas are created by the mind." When we think about a matter [that will benefit others] every moment of every day, never forgetting it, then this matter will be successfully accomplished. If we think "This is so difficult. I cannot do it. Forget it!" then this matter will not be accomplished. Why? Because when we stop thinking of benefiting others, we stop generating energy. Thoughts will truly generate inconceivable energy—this is continual mindfulness.

When one understands this principle, one sees that those who are mindful of Buddha will attain Buddhahood. A

practitioner who chants the Buddha-name will definitely attain rebirth in the Western Pure Land—this is also the same principle. When one mindfully chants “Amituofo” and is mindful of the Western Pure Land—being diligently mindful without any interruption—Amitabha Buddha will definitely come to one.

We should wholeheartedly do things that will bring true, vast and great benefits to all beings. We must ensure that this thought does not cease.

“Offer them all the good roots that one has cultivated to help them attain peace and happiness” teaches us to broaden our minds. Before we began to learn Buddhism, we used to always think of ourselves—our happiness and our family’s. We seldom thought about the country or society. This means that we were not broad-minded.

After we began to learn Buddhism, we read about the great vows of Amitabha Buddha, whose state of mind encompasses the entire Dharma Realm. That is the perfect manifestation of the true mind. We should learn this.

In doing any deed, no matter how small, one should dedicate the merit accrued to all beings, wishing that all suffering beings could leave suffering behind and attain happiness. This is a form of Dharma offerings: by giving of ourselves for all beings.

One does not personally enjoy the good fortune one has cultivated but shares it with all beings. This is the meaning of dedication. One shares one’s wisdom, good fortune, skills, and abilities with all beings, wishing that all beings could have peace and happiness. This is a bodhisattva practice. Can this be done? Yes. If one truly practices, others will benefit. If these people are about to encounter a disaster, and there is someone who has great good fortune and merits, either they will not encounter the disaster or the severity of the disaster will be reduced.

To help avert world disasters, we must earnestly learn and practice. All we need to do is sincerely do our best, with our every thought of doing it for the suffering beings. We will definitely not want to enjoy the merits accrued but offer them universally to all beings.

Bodhisattvas are courageous and diligent. Where do they get their energy from? From this thought of great compassion, they work for all beings, not for themselves. An awakened person will surely behave this way. If one does not behave this way and thinks of oneself and one’s family, or even a small group of people, one is not awakened. One’s mind is still very narrow. An awakened person would undoubtedly have a very broad mind.

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[23] The Dharma will be lost because no one understands the teachings completely to teach us, because the teachings are misinterpreted, or because no one knows the existence of the sutra.—Trans.

**Web link to the article:**

**<http://www.purelandcollege.org.au/page73.html>**

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