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Essence of the Infinite Life Sutra - Venerable Master Chin Kung



EXCERPT TWENTY

One should single-mindedly cultivate a pure mind, set body and mind upright, and eradicate desire and eliminate worry. One should maintain a compassionate mind and make focused and diligent progress. One should not be angry or jealous or be gluttonous or stingy. One should not have regret halfway or have doubts. One should be filial, have utmost sincerity, be loyal, and be trustworthy. One should believe that the Buddha's teachings in the sutras are profound. One should believe that doing good deeds will bring good fortune.

"Should single-mindedly cultivate a pure mind, set body and mind upright, and eradicate desire and eliminate worry. One should maintain a compassionate mind and make focused and diligent progress." These words are of great significance to our cultivation of behavior and thoughts, as well as our health, longevity, and happiness. When one has a long life, one wants to have good health and not show one's age—this is true happiness. How does one achieve this? By single-mindedly cultivating a pure mind.

The Buddha said: "Dependent rewards change according to proper rewards." [25] Proper rewards refer to the mind, or thoughts. But thoughts are not the true mind—they are the false mind. The true mind neither arises nor ceases. It is pure and has no need to do anything. All phenomena—that are manifested by the true mind and that also neither arise nor cease—are called the One True Dharma Realm.

If the true nature is mired in delusion, the true mind—which neither arises nor ceases—will change into a mind that arises and ceases. Today, we have wandering thoughts. When a thought ceases, another one arises. This arising and ceasing is called consciousness—the One True Dharma Realm is thus changed to the Ten Dharma Realms. How does the change occur? It is “altered by the consciousness.” In other words, “all dharmas are created by the mind.”

Thoughts are consciousness. The true mind has no thoughts. The Ten Dharma Realms are created by the mind. In other words, thoughts (consciousness) can change and can create. All the magnificent proper and dependent rewards[26] in the Ten Dharma Realms are what are being changed and created.

If one wants to stay healthy and young, knowing this principle and method will help one change one’s physical condition. If one does not know the principle and method, one will be affected by one’s emotions and the external environment. One will not be in control and thus will suffer.

What kind of mind should one maintain? Be single-minded and have a pure mind. The purer the mind, the healthier the mind. When the mind is healthy, the body will be healthy. If one’s mind and body are pure, how can one not be healthy! One’s physical condition changes in accordance with one’s thoughts and emotions. Control invariably lies in one’s thoughts.

The standard for Buddha-name chanting is One Mind Undisturbed. We should always focus our minds on “Amituofo.” We should take refuge in Amitabha Buddha, turning away from everything else and single-mindedly relying on him. When we truly do so, we will be free of all pollution and will attain purity. “Single-mindedly cultivate a pure mind” is very important!

“Set body and mind upright, and eradicate desire and eliminate worry.” Before this line, we have “single-mindedly cultivate a pure mind,” which refers to keeping the mind proper. When our every gesture, movement, word, and smile accord with the teachings of the Buddha, we are keeping our behavior proper. Setting one’s body and mind upright is behaving in an impressive and dignified manner. This is respectfulness. This is about codes of behavior. In other words, when one behaves in accordance with codes of behavior, one shows respect to the Buddha and the Dharma.

There are great obstacles when body and mind are not upright. One obstacle is desire, and the other is worry. When these two obstacles are eliminated, body and mind will be upright. The obstacle to the body is desire, for it leads the body astray. Our minds will be filled with misery and hardship. Therefore, if one wants to truly make one’s mind and body upright, one must “eradicate desire and eliminate worry.”

Not only should one not have desire for fame, prestige, gain, wealth, the Five Desires, and the Six Dusts, one should also not have desire for bringing “abundant benefits to sentient beings” or helping others.

It is aptly put in the Diamond Sutra that the Buddha helped boundless beings to awaken, but there were really no beings for the Buddha to help. Why did the Buddha say that he did not help a single being? Because, in everything it is good to accord with conditions. According with conditions is to accord with the natural way of things. When conditions are available, wholeheartedly do the best, but take no credit for any of it. When conditions are not available, do not actively seek such conditions.

“One should maintain a compassionate mind and make focused and diligent progress.” Personally, one should maintain a pure mind, and towards others, one should maintain a compassionate mind. “Progress” means to keep on moving forward without retrogressing. “Focused and diligent,” which also refers to progress that is pure and unadulterated, means to courageously and diligently head in one

direction and towards one goal. True cultivation is to have compassion for all, because when one cultivates, one is a role model for all beings. When one succeeds in one's cultivation, one will definitely help all beings.

"One should not be angry or jealous." Anger is a great obstacle. It is said, "A moment of anger will open up the door to millions of obstacles." Why does anger arise? Because one takes everything in this world as real. The Buddha told us "all phenomena are illusory" and "all conditioned existences are like a dream, an illusion, a bubble, or a shadow." Nothing is real! Relationships between humans as well as between humans and all beings and everything else are all about causes, conditions, and effects.

Conditions may be favorable or adverse. When an adverse condition appears, one should know that it results from a bad cause planted in the past. If a person displeases one or goes against one, then one should just laugh it off, as this will cancel out the karmic debt incurred in the past. If one becomes angry, one will incur another debt on top of the old debt. Instead of canceling out the old debt, one will have even more problems. As it is said, "If one owes money, one will repay with money. If one owes life, one will repay with life. Reprisal breeds reprisal. It is cyclical and never ending."

A person who is truly awakened will have a very calm and contented mind. When a favorable condition comes along, one will not feel happy, and when an adverse condition appears, one will not feel angry. One always maintains a pure and honorable mind. When the mind is pure, one will see clearly the causes and effects of a matter and will not become angry.

One is jealous because one cannot bear to see others do well. A person receives something good because this person had cultivated a good cause—this is his or her reward. What is there to be jealous of? If we want good rewards, we only need to plant good causes. We should know to rejoice at others' meritorious deeds and help them accomplish them. When it comes to bad deeds, we should not help people commit them.

"One should not . . . be gluttonous or stingy." In a narrow sense, "gluttonous" means being fussy about food. In a broader sense, it includes all material enjoyment. A stingy person is someone who is unwilling to give to others.

From giving, the merits are tremendous: in our present life, we can end afflictions and eliminate karmic obstacles; in our cultivation, we can break through ignorance and see the true nature. This is why bodhisattvas' cultivation is the practice of giving.

There are three types of giving: the giving of wealth, the giving of teachings, and the giving of fearlessness. The Six Paramitas are various forms of giving. Precept observation and patience are forms of the giving of fearlessness. For example, if we observe the precept of not stealing, people will not be on guard against us or fear us. This is the giving of fearlessness. If we practice patience, we will not mind when someone unintentionally says something offensive to us.

Diligence, meditative concentration, and wisdom are forms of the giving of teachings. The Six Paramitas dictate all forms of practice. The boundless Dharma doors practiced by bodhisattvas do not fall outside the Six Paramitas—and the Six Paramitas are all subsumed under giving. From this we can see that the merit of giving is truly inconceivable.

We just need to single-mindedly cultivate a pure mind, set the body and the mind upright, and practice giving more often. We will receive inconceivable merit.

Being gluttonous and stingy—residual habits from countless kalpas—are great obstacles to the practice of giving and must be overcome. One should live a thrifty life and maintain this simple life. Even when one becomes successful and has great wealth in the future, one should still live thriftily. This way, one will truly have good fortune.

A good example in Chinese history is the Prime Minister Fan Zhongyan of the Song dynasty. He came from a poor family. When he was a county-level scholar, he was so poor that every day he would divide the porridge that he cooked into four portions, eating a portion for each meal. Even when he became the prime minister, he still maintained a very simple life. He had a very high salary, which he spent on charity and the poor. During the time when he was the prime minister, he supported more than three hundred households with his income. Therefore, he led a very hard and austere life. Great Master Yinguang greatly admired him and considered him a person worthy of respect and emulation, and in China, second only to Confucius.

Nowadays, many old people set aside an amount of money for future medical bills. The Buddha said: "All dharmas are created by the mind." If every day we think about getting old and falling sick, how can we not look old or get sick? If we change our way of thinking and give the money that has been set aside to help those who are poor and sick, we will not get sick. Why will we not fall sick? Because there is no money set aside for getting sick [for we no longer think and worry about it]!

When we learn Buddhism, we should learn wisdom like this.

I do not get sick because I know the law of cause and effect. This is why I have donated my medical-contingency money. I am truly at ease!

One should not be stingy. Helping others is helping oneself. If one thinks about aging and sickness every day, one will truly bring harm to oneself.

"One should not have regret halfway." When we do a good deed, regretting it halfway through will result in our early efforts counting for nothing. For example, one learns and practices the Pure Land method, but after a period of time, one hears that there is another method that is better. Regretting one's previous choice, one starts to practice another method. This is wrong. No matter what others say, one should not have second thoughts—just continue with the Pure Land method.

"Not . . . have doubts" means that we should absolutely not doubt the teachings of the sages or Buddhas and bodhisattvas. This way, we will be able to truly make focused and diligent progress.

"One should be filial." Filial piety is the absolute foundation of Buddhism. Frankly, only when one attains Buddhahood can filial piety be practiced to perfection. Only a Buddha can be perfectly filial.

If we want to practice filial piety to perfection, we just need to single-mindedly chant the Buddha-name and seek rebirth in the Western Pure Land. When we meet Amitabha Buddha, our filial piety will then be perfect. It is because [once we are in the Pure Land] we will be able to recognize our parents and also all our parents from past lifetimes and clearly know which paths they are in, so that when the conditions are mature, they will listen and accept our advice to mindfully chant the Buddha-name when we urge them to. This way, we will have the ability to help them. We will be able to help our families, friends, and those who have an affinity with us—from every one of our lifetimes—transcend the Six Paths, attain rebirth in the Western Pure Land, and attain Buddhahood. This is great filial piety! This is true filial piety!

Presently, it is good if we can take good care of our parents, in particular their spiritual well-being when they are advancing in age. The most important of all is to urge them to mindfully chant the Buddha-name. This is true filial piety. If our parents do not accept our advice, this is because we have not learned Buddhism well enough. If we really follow the Buddha's way, they will naturally accept our advice. When we diligently learn Buddhism, we will influence our parents. This requires patience and waiting for the proper time and right conditions.

“Have utmost sincerity, be loyal, and be trustworthy.”

“Utmost sincerity” means being absolutely and completely sincere. When we are sincere to the Buddha, to the Dharma, and to our teachers, we will truly benefit.

Loyalty and trustworthiness are the norms when we interact with others and engage in tasks.

“One should believe that the Buddha’s teachings in the sutras are profound.” This is true wisdom. In particular, the Pure Land texts, such as the Amitabha Sutra, the Infinite Life Sutra, and the Visualization Sutra, are as the Buddha said—Dharma that is hard to believe. This is because even though the texts do not seem to be profound, the meanings and the states described are actually infinitely profound and broad. Great Master Shandao said in his Commentaries on the Visualization Sutra that it is not just ordinary people who cannot thoroughly understand the teachings in these three sutras, but also arhats, pratyekabuddhas, and the bodhisattvas of the Provisional Teaching. Therefore, not only do ordinary beings find it hard to believe the sutras, even the great bodhisattvas still have doubts. These sutras are truly Dharma that is hard to believe.

Although the Dharma is hard to believe, it is easy to practice. If we practice accordingly, we will succeed! We have to believe that these teachings describe the state of Buddhas at the attainment stage, not the states of bodhisattvas. This is why it is hard to believe and understand.

“Should believe that doing good deeds will bring good fortune.” The previous sentence, “One should believe that the Buddha’s teachings in the sutras are profound,” is about the Buddha-dharma. This phrase, “. . . should believe that doing good deeds will bring good fortune,” is about mundane teachings. This teaches us to deeply believe in causality: a virtuous mind will surely bring about good fortune; evil thoughts will surely bring about misfortune. Good and bad thoughts are causes, and good fortune and misfortune are results.

[25] Dependant reward is the part of the reward on which one’s existence depends; the secondary and circumstantial part of the reward which one receives in this life as the result of acts in previous lives, such as house, utensils and surroundings . . . The proper reward is the principal reward which one receives in this life as the result of acts in previous lives, namely, one’s own body and mind. . . Hisao Inagaki, A Dictionary of Japanese Buddhist Terms (Nagata Bunshodo, Kyoto, 2003, 5th Edition), 43 and 311.

[26] Proper rewards are also described as main rewards. “Dependent and main rewards are based on past karmic actions. The ‘main rewards’ refer to living beings, while the ‘dependent rewards’ refer to the physical environment on which the living beings ‘depend,’ such as the land, ponds, trees, and so forth.”— Van Hien Study Group, The Seeker’s Glossary of Buddhism (Sutra Committee of the United States and Canada, New York, 2003, 2nd Edition), 180.

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