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Essence of the Infinite Life Sutra - Venerable Master Chin Kung



EXCERPT TWENTY ONE

They completely realize that all dharmas are like a dream, an illusion, or an echo.

“Echo” refers to reverberated sounds. If we shout in a valley, there will be echoes. This excerpt sentence conveys the same meaning as this teaching in the Diamond Sutra: “All conditioned existences are like a dream, an illusion, a bubble, or a shadow.” Both explain the truth of all phenomena in the universe.

All phenomena exist but they do not truly exist because their existence does not last forever but changes from moment to moment. That is why phenomena are said to be impermanent.

Therefore, we can use and enjoy the phenomena but should not be attached to them. When we are attached, we will suffer. All afflictions, evil karmas, and retributions arise from attachment.

All phenomena, including our bodies, are impermanent. Therefore, we should also not be attached to our bodies; where the body is concerned, we should just accord with conditions. If we become ill, we can cure the illness with a pure mind and we will recover. The body changes according to the mind. When the mind is pure, all the organs in the body will naturally work properly—there will be no illnesses.

This excerpt is to teach bodhisattvas to have true wisdom, to truly and thoroughly awaken, and to realize that all phenomena are not real. If one is truly awakened, one will naturally be unperturbed in any situation and one can

enter very deep meditative concentration—being unperturbed is achieving meditative concentration. When one's mind is not perturbed, one will truly understand all phenomena. This understanding is wisdom. Being free of discrimination and attachment is meditative concentration. When we have both meditative concentration and wisdom, meditative concentration and wisdom are perfect and complete. This is where we start to cultivate meditative concentration and wisdom. This is real.

The Diamond Sutra says: "All conditioned existences are like a dream, an illusion, a bubble, or a shadow, like a dewdrop or a flash of lightning. Contemplate them thus." "Dewdrop" refers to the morning dew. "A flash of lightning" exists for an extremely short time. "Contemplate them thus" means that this view is correct and is the truth. In all situations, when one's mind has no thoughts of gain or loss, true or false, good or bad, right or wrong, and beneficial or harmful—one's mind will be completely pure.

The Buddha talked about true and false, right and wrong, good and bad, and beneficial and harmful. Who are these teachings for? For ordinary beings. For those who cannot see through to the truth. When one cannot see through, one has attachment. When there is any single thought of discrimination or attachment, in everything there is truth and falsehood, there is right and wrong, and there is good and bad. In his aim to guide people to end wrongdoings and practice virtuous conduct, the Buddha had no choice but to use expedient teaching.

We should know that the Buddha, in his expedient teaching, used diametrically opposed principles. This duality helps us to not fall into the Three Evil Paths. We should first keep ourselves in the Three Good Paths and avoid falling into the Three Evil Paths. This is, however, not the true purpose of the Buddha's teaching. The true purpose is to help all beings transcend the Three Realms and attain Buddhahood in one lifetime. But because the beings cannot accept this, the Buddha used expedient teaching. As to the true teaching, there is no teaching to expound on.

EXCERPT TWENTY TWO

They thoroughly understand the nature of all dharmas: everything is empty and without self.

The word "dharmas" refers to phenomena. The word "nature" refers to innate character or noumenon. The noumenon of all phenomena is empty and quiescent. When the Buddha said that all phenomena are empty, he meant that the noumenon is empty: phenomena do not have self-nature and are empty in themselves.

Everything is empty and without self. "Self" implies being in control. "Everything is empty and without self" means that no one controls the phenomena. Then, how do phenomena come about? They arise from the combination of various conditions. Boundless conditions gather and generate them. Therefore, phenomena do not have self-nature or self-identity.

When we are clear about this truth, we should absolutely not attach to any phenomena or give rise to any thought. The mind should always be pure, impartial, and awakened.

EXCERPT TWENTY THREE

They completely understand all the Buddhas' profound teachings. They tame all their faculties. Their bodies are supple and their minds are gentle. They delve deeply into true wisdom and no longer have residual habits.

The word “profound” conveys depth, not secrecy. Secrecy means that there is something that cannot be revealed to others, and so this something must not be a good thing. Buddhism has no secrets. “Profound” in Buddhism means that—with the capacities of the beings being low, and with the Buddha’s teachings being tremendously profound in noumenon and broad in meaning—careless people cannot understand the teachings. This is why Buddhism is “profound.”

What is “all the Buddhas’ profound teachings”? It is “Namo Amitufo”—this is the profound teaching of all the Buddhas in the ten directions and three time periods. This is why the merit of the name of Amitabha Buddha is inconceivable.

The Buddha’s great wisdom, virtues, and capabilities, and his skillful use of expedient teaching in helping all beings are very profound. We cannot understand any of these but the bodhisattvas born in the Western Pure Land all “completely understand.” If we can completely understand, we will be no different from the bodhisattvas of the Western Pure Land.

If one truly and thoroughly understands, one will dedicate oneself to mindfully chanting the Buddha-name and have absolutely no doubts. Then one is a bodhisattva of the Land of Ultimate Bliss. Although one is currently not there yet, one will definitely be reborn there.

There are very few who understand all the Buddha’s profound teachings. Great Master Shandao said that many bodhisattvas are not even aware that this method is the fastest, most reliable, and perfect method for attaining Buddhahood. In Chinese history, many patriarchs and eminent masters of other schools turned to the Pure Land teachings after they truly understood the Pure Land method in their old age. All of them concentrated on mindfully chanting the Buddha-name and sought rebirth in the Western Pure Land.

Anyone who clearly understands this method will practice it.

The Western Pure Land is an ultimate, perfect state. If a person wants to learn a particular method, this person, whatever his capacity, will hear the method that accords with his or her capacity. For example, if one has the capacity for Theravada teachings, one will hear Buddhas and bodhisattvas lecturing on Theravada teachings. If one has the capacity for Mahayana teachings, one will hear nothing but Mahayana teachings. A being will immediately hear what he or she wants to hear, and immediately see what he or she wants to see—all at the level of the being’s capacity. This is great perfection and truly ultimate.

Therefore, in the Western Pure Land, everything that one’s faculties [that is, six sense organs] come into contact with is (1) the state of the Buddha-dharma and (2) revealed from the innate virtues of Amitabha Buddha. In such a wondrous environment, how could one be deluded? How could afflictions arise? Therefore, all of one’s faculties are naturally tamed.

“They tame all their faculties.” “Faculties” refers to the body, a strong body without any problems. We all want a strong body. How do we get it? If we learn to tame all our faculties, our bodies will naturally become strong.

There are many ways to tame our faculties. Zen meditation is a major method. There are also other methods such as (1) samatha and vipasyana, (2) observing and illuminating, (3) chanting mantras, and (4) chanting a Buddha’s name. But no method surpasses the Buddha-name chanting method. Why? Because when one mindfully chants the Buddha-name, one will receive help from the Buddhas.

Some people may say that when one chants mantras, one will also get help from Buddhas and bodhisattvas. Indeed, when chanting mantras as practiced by the Esoteric school, the Buddhas and bodhisattvas will also be there to help, but it is not as good as chanting the name of Amitabha Buddha. When one chants mantras, one will have the help of one or two Buddhas or bodhisattvas. To have the help of three to five Buddhas and bodhisattvas is incredible. But when one mindfully chants the name of Amitabha Buddha, one will have the help of all the Buddhas in the ten directions and in the three time periods. This is why the merit of the name of Amitabha Buddha is inconceivable!

At all times, when one single-mindedly chants the Buddha-name, the mind will be free of all wandering thoughts, afflictions, worries, and concerns. Mindfully chanting the Buddha-name will thus tame all of one's faculties. One's body will be supple and one's mind will be gentle. One will be able to achieve physical and mental well-being.

We may want to ask, "What is the method that the bodhisattvas of the Western Pure Land practice to achieve taming all their faculties and having a supple body and gentle mind?" It is mindfully chanting "Amitufo." As Mahasthamaprapta Bodhisattva said, "I and fifty-two fellow practitioners. . . ." "Fifty-two" refers to the ten stages of faith, ten stages of abiding, ten stages of practice, ten stages of dedication, ten stages of ground, the stage of equal enlightenment, and the stage of wondrous enlightenment. "Fellow practitioners" refers to practitioners who shared the same aspiration and focused on practicing the Pure Land method. This tells us that from Mahasthamaprapta Bodhisattva's initial generation of the bodhi mind until attainment of Buddhahood, he practiced the chanting of "Amitufo," without any changes. This is truly inconceivable! Chanting "Amitufo" enables us ordinary beings to attain Buddhahood.

After attaining Buddhahood, what method is used to universally help all beings? It is still mindfully chanting "Amitufo." This is the Mahasthamaprapta Dharma door.

Mr. Xia Lianju wrote in Essentials for Practice of the Pure Land School that Mahasthamaprapta Bodhisattva is the first patriarch of the Pure Land school. When I first read it, I felt great admiration. That Mr. Xia could make such a statement is not an easy thing!

Mahasthamaprapta Bodhisattva is the first one in the entire Dharma Realm to advocate practicing only the Pure Land method. Therefore, he is the first Pure Land patriarch in the Dharma Realms.

In the Avatamsaka Sutra, Samantabhadra Bodhisattva taught the Ten Great Vows and guided all beings to rebirth in the Western Pure Land. Thus, Samantabhadra Bodhisattva is the first Pure Land patriarch in the Saha world.

During the Eastern Jin dynasty, Great Master Huiyuan built a cultivation hall on Mt. Lu and brought together one hundred and twenty-three fellow practitioners to practice solely the Buddha-name chanting method. He is the first Pure Land patriarch in China.

All these patriarchs advocated the practice and propagation of only the Pure Land teachings.

When we are clear about all these, we will be able to dissolve doubt and develop belief. We need nothing but the Amitabha Sutra (or the Infinite Life Sutra) and the chanting of "Amitufo." Our doubts will truly be dissolved.

If we diligently learn and practice this way, after three to five years we will be sure of attaining rebirth in the Western Pure Land and will not waste this lifetime. As stated in the sutras, once one has done what needs to be done, one will no longer be in samsara. One can truly achieve this.

But if we learn in an unfocused way, our rebirth into the Pure Land is not guaranteed, and we will have to depend on the conditions at the end of our lives. We must know this.

“They delve deeply into true wisdom.” When the mind is pure, wisdom will manifest. When the pure mind is at work, it is true wisdom. Not only have the bodhisattvas of the Western Pure Land perfectly attained it, but if we learn and practice according to this method, we will also enjoy physical and mental well-being and be free of any illness.

The cause of all illnesses in this world is an impure mind. When the mind is pure, how can one become ill! When the mind is pure, the body will be tamed. When the body is tamed, one’s physiology will be normal and will completely accord with the natural law. When everything is normal, there will be no obstruction.

When one has afflictions or worries, there will be changes in one’s physiology, which will cause abnormalities. One thus becomes ill.

When we understand this principle and truth, we will be able to cultivate a healthy body. Furthermore, we will be able to attain freedom from life and death. When we are about to pass away, we will know the time in advance. We will not suffer from any illness. We can choose when to leave. This shows true achievement in cultivation.

“No longer have residual habits” means that one has completely eliminated all residual habits. It is not easy to achieve this in our practice here in this world. Residual habits are truly difficult to eliminate. But when we are reborn in the Western Pure Land, we will be able to achieve this.

Web link to the article:

<http://www.purelandcollege.org.au/page76.html>

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