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Essence of the Infinite Life Sutra - Venerable Master Chin Kung



EXCERPT SEVEN

Great compassion arose from these bodhisattvas. They empathized with all sentient beings. With a heart of compassion, they lectured on the teachings, taught by example, and also imparted the Dharma Eyes. They blocked all evil paths and opened the door of virtuousness. They regarded all beings as themselves. They rescued and helped living beings and shouldered the burden of helping them all cross over to the other shore.

“Arose” means came forth. The words “taught by example” mean to demonstrate through behavior. “Lectured on” means to speak the Dharma. Not only did the bodhisattvas teach with words, but they also taught by example. In “imparted the Dharma Eyes,” “imparted” means to pass on, “Dharma” means method of practice, and “Eyes” is a metaphor. This metaphor refers to helping others understand the truth of all phenomena and principles.

In “blocked all evil paths,” “blocked” means to prevent and be on guard and “evil paths” means the Bad Realms. “The door of virtuousness” means, simply put, the virtuous teachings that enable one to be reborn in the human or heavenly path.

Sentient beings are deluded. They indulge in the Five Desires[7] and the Six Dusts[8]—in worldly pleasures. We should

generate a mind of great compassion, empathize with sentient beings, and introduce the Pure Land method to them. Compassion and empathy must be put into action. This is enthusiastically propagating the Pure Land method. With all our hearts we must do our best—we must treat this task as the most important thing in this lifetime.

“With a heart of compassion, they lectured on the teachings, taught by example, and also imparted the Dharma Eyes. They blocked all evil paths and opened the door of virtuousness.” These sentences describe the method of teaching. We do not need to be onstage to expound on Buddhism, but we should do so whenever and wherever we encounter someone. We introduce Buddhism to that person in a way that is most suitable for that person. If he or she cannot accept Buddhism at all, simply say “Namo Amituofo.” As time goes by and the person gradually understands, that person will also say “Namo Amituofo” the next time we meet. In this way, we will have accomplished our goal. This is just one of many ways.

For example, a practitioner is always happy and healthy, something everyone very much envies. If we are truly healthy and happy, others will surely ask us, “Why are you always happy?” We tell them, “Because I mindfully chant the Buddha-name.” Practicing Buddha-name chanting will lead to true happiness and good health. If they feel happy in listening to our explanation, then we are making good use of the opportunity to teach them. “Taught by example” refers to us living a happy, satisfied, and joyful life. This is a good signboard for the Buddha’s teaching. When people see this, they will like it and will want this happiness for themselves. Hence, they will want to learn Buddhism.

How does one avoid falling into the evil paths? If one does not create evil karmas, naturally one will not fall into the evil paths. Evil paths are due mainly to evil thoughts—evil thought is the cause. Evil conduct is unvirtuous karma and bad retributions will surely follow. The law of cause and effect never fails.

If we do not want to have any bad retributions, we should not have any bad thoughts. With pure and proper thoughts, we will definitely not have any bad retributions.

The words “opened the door of virtuousness” mean urging people to end wrongdoings and to practice virtuous conduct. When people end wrongdoings and practice virtuous conduct, the benefit will go to them; the benefit does not involve us. Those who do this will receive the benefit. It is not that others practice and we benefit. Definitely, when we practice we benefit. When this happens, we are proving to others that good rewards come from ending wrongdoings and practicing virtuous conduct.

There are people who become scared when we tell them about transcending the Three Realms^[9] and attaining Buddhahood. But they get happy when we talk about them becoming immensely rich and important in their next lifetime. When we encounter such people, we should teach them the methods of being born as a human or a heavenly being.

There are also people who have great aspirations. They know that the Three Realms are filled with sufferings, and that even in the heavenly path—where good fortune is great and the life span is long—the heavenly beings will still die one day. For these people with great aspirations, their wish is to transcend the Three Realms. We should teach them the methods of transcending the Three Realms. This is a door of great virtuousness.

Frankly, the only method of practice that allows one to succeed in one lifetime is the Buddha-name chanting method. In all my forty-plus years of learning Buddhism, this is what I have realized. The Buddha-name chanting method is truly wondrous. If we introduce it to others, we are opening the door of utmost virtuousness. Nothing is more virtuous than this.

“They regarded all beings as themselves. They rescued and helped living beings and shouldered the burden of helping them all cross over to the other shore.” When we treat others like we would treat ourselves, that is, with no difference whatsoever, it is “unconditional compassion for all others as we are all one entity” as taught in Mahayana Buddhism. We should treat all impartially. As long as a person accepts our help, we should wholeheartedly help this person.

Buddhist practitioners should have this vow: help all beings far and wide, uphold the proper teachings, and pass on the Buddha’s wisdom to future generations.

[7] The Five Desires are wealth, sex, fame, food, and sleep.—Trans.

[8] The Six Dusts are pollutants of the Six Senses of sight, sound, smell, taste, touch, and thought.—Trans.

[9] Three Realms: Desire, Form, and Formless realms. The Desire realm consists of the paths of hells, hungry ghosts, animals, humans, asuras, and desire heavens.—Trans.

EXCERPT EIGHT

The Thus Come One commiserates with the beings in the Three Realms with infinite great compassion. This is why he appears in the world: to expound Buddhist teachings and spread them everywhere, like light; to help all beings; and to bring true benefit to them.

“Light” has the meaning of reaching places far and wide. “Expound” means to teach and to propagate. “Buddhist teachings” refers to the way to transcend life and death and to perfectly attain Buddhahood. “Help” means to save and to rescue. “True benefit” refers to fulfilling the wishes of all beings.

This excerpt explains the reason why the Buddha came to this world. Why did he appear in India and not in China? Although Chinese culture had existed for a long time, the highest aspiration of the Chinese was to be reborn in the heavens. They did not have the thought of transcending the Three Realms. For rebirth in the human or heavenly paths, Confucian teachings and Taoist teachings were sufficient. Therefore, the Buddha did not need to go there.

At the time when Sakyamuni Buddha appeared in India, many religions were flourishing. The sutras mentioned six major non-Buddhist masters. The practitioners of Brahmanism, the Yoga system, and Samkhya were able to attain very high levels of meditative concentration: they were able to be reborn in the Fourth Formless Heaven, a feat that the Chinese had not been able to accomplish. Frankly, when the Chinese were reborn in the heavens, they could only get to the heavens in the Desire Realm. They could not get to the heavens in the Form Realm.

Indians could be reborn in the heavens in the Form Realm and even in the Formless Realm but they could not transcend them. They thought that the Fourth Meditation Heaven or the Fourth Formless Heaven was the state of nirvana. It was a great misconception.

Therefore, at that time, only the people in India, out of all the people in the world, had the right capacities and mature conditions. The Buddha “commiserated with the beings in the Three Realms” and appeared there to help them transcend the Six Paths and attain the true Bodhi and nirvana.

The Buddha was impartial. When the condition of the beings in a place was mature, he would use the most appropriate method to teach them. As stated in “Universal Door Chapter”:[10] “For those who will only be liberated upon the manifestation of a Buddha, then the manifestation in the form of a Buddha will appear to present the teachings.” In India, they needed a Buddha to teach them and in China, they needed a bodhisattva. The manifestations were different but the objective was the same. The objective was “to help all beings; and to bring true benefit to them.”

If a person wants to be reborn in the heavens, the Buddha will teach the method to that person, and he or she will be truly reborn there. This is bringing true benefit to that person.

The absolutely perfect, true benefit is attaining Buddhahood. Becoming a Bodhisattva of Equal Enlightenment is not yet ultimate and perfect. The Infinite Life Sutra teaches us the method of seeking rebirth in the Western Pure Land through belief, vow, and mindful Buddha-name chanting. It is the ultimate and perfect true benefit.

As mentioned in the three Pure Land sutras, we can perfectly accomplish the goal of rebirth in the Land of Ultimate Bliss in one lifetime, without waiting until the next lifetime. There, in the four lands, each with nine grades, the environment as well as all the beings are wondrously magnificent.

The teaching of Sakyamuni Buddha at this Dharma assembly is absolutely true. The Buddha mentioned “true” three times in this sutra. It is very rare for the word “true” to be mentioned three times in a sutra.

[10] This chapter is from the Lotus Sutra.—Trans.

Web link to the article: <http://www.amtb.cn/e-bud/Essence-of-the-Infinite-Life-Sutra.html>

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