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



### EXCERPT TWENTY SIX

[Those Bodhisattvas] have a mind of great compassion and of bringing benefits to all beings. They discard all attachments and accomplish infinite merits and virtues.

“Great” refers to a pure and impartial mind—such a mind is free of discrimination and attachment. Great compassion is compassion from a pure mind and an impartial mind.

This excerpt tells us that the bodhisattvas of the Western Pure Land have the ability to travel to all the Buddha Lands and to any place in the entire Dharma Realm. The sutras teach that the past has no beginning and the future has no end. From this, we know that space (in Buddhism it is called Dharma Realm) is immensely vast. This is the area the bodhisattvas cover in their travels—the vastness of the Dharma Realm. If they have an affinity with a place, they will manifest themselves there to benefit the beings.

The conditions are mature for some beings but are not for others. If a being does not have the conditions, one should help the being develop the conditions. If the conditions of a being are not yet mature, one should help them mature. If the conditions of a being have matured, one should guide that being to attain rebirth in the Western Pure Land.

The standard for mature conditions in the Pure Land school is different from those in other schools. In other schools, a practitioner needs to completely eradicate all afflictions and attain great awakening. In the Pure Land school, a practitioner needs to have true belief, be willing to make the vow, and sincerely chant the Buddha-name. Such a practitioner is a being whose conditions have matured. This cultivation is easier than in other schools.

Throughout the boundless worlds in the ten directions, the bodhisattvas of the Land of Ultimate Bliss (1) seek the Buddha-dharma and (2) help all beings. When they seek the Buddha-dharma, they are not attached to the act of seeking. When they help beings, they are not attached to the act of helping. They discard all attachments and teach all beings. This way, they are able to attain infinite merits and virtues.

In “merits and virtues,” “merits” refers to effort, and “virtues” refers to result. “Merits” is the cause; “virtues” is the result. How does one cultivate merits? The Buddha taught us these three principles—which are the Three Learnings to preserve [our merits and virtues]: precepts, meditative concentration, and wisdom.

One practices according to the precepts, meditative concentration, and wisdom. For example, if one observes the precepts and attains meditative concentration, precept observation is “merits” [effort], and meditative concentration is “virtues” [result]. If one cultivates meditative concentration and attains awakening, the cultivation of meditative concentration is “merits,” and awakening is “virtues.”

If one observes the precepts but does not have meditative concentration, then this is not considered as “merits and virtues.” There is “merits” [effort] but no “virtues” [result]. Here, precept observation will turn into good fortune—one will have good fortune in the human or heavenly path in the next lifetime.

If one cultivates meditative concentration but does not attain awakening, one will have the karmic result of being reborn in the heavens, in the Form Realm or the Formless Realm—one will not transcend the Three Realms. This good fortune [of being reborn into the heavens] is minuscule. If one attains enlightenment and uncovers one’s true nature, one will transcend the Three Realms.

“Infinite merits and virtues” signifies the attainment of Buddhahood. Only when one is a Buddha will one be replete with “infinite merits and virtues.” This is our ultimate goal in learning Buddhism.

How do we accomplish infinite merits and virtues? By discarding all attachments. From this we can see that the reason why we cannot succeed in our practice is due to our not being able to let go of our attachments. Therefore, we should not be attached to either worldly phenomena or supramundane teachings. If we can discard all wandering thoughts and attachments, we will attain infinite merits and virtues.

If there is even one thing that we cannot discard or let go of, we will not have any achievement. But to let go is truly hard. Because of this, infinite great compassion arose in Amitabha Buddha, and he established a special cultivation place in the Dharma Realm for learning and practice—for beings like us who cannot let go to also have achievement. This is inconceivable!

With the cultivation places of all the other Buddhas in the ten directions, one must let go of both worldly phenomena and supramundane teachings before one can be reborn there. But, only in the land of Amitabha Buddha, [while letting go is ideal,] not letting go is also alright. This way, everyone will be truly helped and awakened.

When we get to the Western Pure Land, Amitabha Buddha and the beings of superior goodness (in other words, the great bodhisattvas) will help us discard all our attachments so that we can attain supreme enlightenment.

## EXCERPT TWENTY SEVEN

They know that all phenomena are empty and quiescent. Retribution body and afflictions—both remnants are completely eradicated.

“They know that all phenomena are empty and quiescent”—this sentence conveys exactly the same meaning as “the four basic elements are all empty” and “the five aggregates are without self-identity.” The four basic elements refer to the four qualities of a physical substance: earth, water, fire, and air.

Earth refers to substance. In Buddhism, the tiniest substance is called a speck of dust; in science, it is the atom, electron, or particle. Earth signifies that substance does exist and can be detected by scientific instruments. Water indicates moisture. Fire indicates temperature. The scientific terms are electropositive and electronegative. Fire is electropositive and water is electronegative. Air indicates motion: it is not still. In addition, it moves at great speed.

The four basic elements are the four fundamental features of a substance. All phenomena in the universe are made up of this basic substance. The Diamond Sutra says: “a composite is not a composite. It is called a composite.” This basic substance makes up all phenomena, from something as large as a planet or a galaxy to something as small as a speck of dust.

Where does the basic substance come from? It is manifestation of the mind. A commentary of the Consciousness-only school says that from ignorance and non-enlightenment the Three Subtle Marks arise, and with the external environment as conditions the Six Coarse Marks grow. Within the Three Subtle Marks are the subjective aspect [28] and the objective aspect: the mark of the subjective perceiver and the mark of the objective world. [29]

The basic substance is the mark of the objective world, which is the objective aspect. The objective aspect is generated by the subjective aspect. Existence arises from non-existence and returns to non-existence—“all phenomena are empty and quiescent.” When we understand this, we will know the truth that all phenomena are empty.

Do what we see, hear, and touch presently exist? Or do they not exist? From the perspective of principles, they do not exist; from the perspective of phenomena, they do exist. This existence is nominal: it is not real. But the non-existence is real. What is real never changes. That which changes is not real. Non-existence never changes and is thus called true emptiness.

With regards to existence, all phenomena change. It is obvious that a person goes through birth, aging, illness, and death. Any person can perceive these changes. In actuality, there are subtler changes, such as the metabolism of the cells of a body. Such changes occur every instant. Plants go through arising, abiding, changing, and extinction. Minerals or planets go through formation, existence, annihilation, and voidness. We realize all this. Therefore, all phenomena are constantly changing. Since they change, they are not real. This is why existence is called nominal existence, illusory existence, or marvelous existence. Thus this Buddhist term: true emptiness and marvelous existence.

But we should know that existence and non-existence in Buddhism are one. Where is true emptiness? It is in marvelous existence. Where is marvelous existence? It is in true emptiness. True emptiness refers to noumenon, and marvelous existence refers to phenomena. This way, we will be able to see the mark of the objective world clearly. What is the benefit of seeing it clearly? It will help us discard all attachments.

From where do attachments arise? From us not understanding the truth and from thinking that we can own things. Not only can we not own worldly possessions, we cannot even own our body, so is there any point in being attached to anything? Naturally, we will let go! When we truly let go we will attain eternal life.

True emptiness refers to the true nature. Why is true nature true emptiness? Because there is no sign of it: it shows no form and thus cannot be perceived by the eyes. True nature emits no sound and thus cannot be heard by the ears. It cannot be perceived or imagined. Our Six Sense Organs absolutely cannot detect anything here. But true nature truly exists. It is the noumenon of all phenomena in the universe. All phenomena arise from it. When one sees the true nature, one is in the state of neither arising nor ceasing. One will have the freedom to manifest as any form. One will be able to manifest in any form one wishes.

We are now deluded, so we cannot manifest as anything no matter how hard we think. After we see the true nature, we will be able to manifest as anything. Throughout the entire Dharma Realm, we will be in control—we will be our own master; we will attain great freedom!

Therefore, we must know the truth: "All phenomena are empty and quiescent." This is stated from principles, from noumenon.

"Retribution body and afflictions—both remnants are completely eradicated." "Both" refers to the retribution body and afflictions. "Remnants" refers to habits, and they are the hardest to eliminate. "Retribution body" signifies birth and death—when we transmigrate within the Six Paths, we continually get a body and discard it.

Transmigration is a phenomenon. Why is there this phenomenon? Because we have afflictions. The phenomenon of transmigration within the Six Paths is generated by afflictions. When we end afflictions, there will be no transmigration. For example, arhats—having eradicated the Affliction of Views and Thoughts—have transcended the Six Paths.

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[28] Yogacara Buddhism speaks of four aspects of the functioning mind, two of which are the subjective aspect (that which sees) and the objective aspect (what is seen).—Trans.

[29] The third subtle mark is the mark of karma from ignorance.—Trans.

**Web link to the article:**

**<http://www.purelandcollege.org.au/page82.html>**

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