

Hanshan's Pure Land of the Patriarchs

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Excerpts From Master Han-Shan's Dream Roamings translated into english by Master LokTo

Pure Land of the Patriarchs is a translation of selected passages from the sermons and writings of Zen Master Han-shan Te-ch'ing, one of the three "dragon-elephants" of Ming Buddhism. These passages originally appeared in the Han-Shan Ta-Shih Meng-Yu Chi (Collection of Master Han-Shan's Dream Roamings).

Zen and Pure Land

(Talk at the Lotus Society of Great Enlightenment)

When Buddha Sakyamuni dwelled in the world, He spread the Dharma (teaching) and converted sentient beings. The entire fourfold assembly (monks, nuns, laymen and laywomen) obtained the benefit of the Dharma. He taught people according to their capacities, using different expedient methods so that all could obtain happiness and wisdom. As when there are timely rains and all trees and grass receive moisture and thrive, so all sentient beings derive benefits and grow by themselves.

There are numerous different methods, but they all spring from the same source. Since sentient beings all possess the Buddha Nature, there is no one who cannot be rescued. Since they have the same intrinsic Mind, no one is incapable of cultivation. But, sentient beings are confused and lacking in wisdom. Moreover, they need true teachers to guide them. Therefore, they are bound to drown in the ocean of suffering.

When Hui-Neng, the Sixth Patriarch of Zen, came to see the Fifth Patriarch, he was asked, "Where do you come from?" Hui-Neng replied, "I come from Ling-Nan (South China)." The Fifth Patriarch asked, "Do the southern barbarians also have the Buddha Nature?" Hui-Neng answered, "People distinguish between North and South, but the Buddha Nature has no North or South."

Since these words were uttered, as thunder to wake up all who hibernate, they have spread across the world. But not many people understand and very few have awakened. It is more than a thousand years now since Zen came out of southern China and was spread across the land by the

Sixth Patriarch, but many people still do not [fully] understand it. Therefore, the Buddha Recitation Samadhi, singleminded recitation of Amitabha Buddha's name and visualization of the Buddha are still taught. (5)

To practice Pure Land, one must abhor the condition of suffering [in the Saha world] and seek to be reborn in the Pure Land of Amitabha Buddha. One must practice Buddha Recitation every day, bow to Amitabha Buddha and recite sutras, to eliminate evil karma. Practitioners must be firm in their faith, reduce their evil karma day after day and make a vow to be reborn in the Western Pure Land. Anyone who can really practice in this manner, even though he may be living in this Saha world of Birth and Death, will have a meaningful goal for his practice. (6)

The word "Buddha" means enlightened. All sentient beings have the same Buddha Nature. Therefore, everyone can be enlightened. One who is confused about the Buddha Nature is a sentient being. One who is awakened about the Buddha Nature is called Buddha. When one recites the Buddha's name, Buddha Amitabha is one's Self-Nature, the Pure Land is the blissful land of one's own mind. Anyone who can singlemindedly recite the Buddha's name in thought after thought and concentrate deeper and deeper will always find Amitabha Buddha appearing in his own mind. It is not necessary to seek the Pure Land far away, ten billion Buddha lands beyond. (7) Therefore, if the mind is pure, the land is pure. If the mind is defiled, the land is defiled. If an evil thought comes to mind, then many obstacles appear. If a good thought arises, peace is everywhere. Thus, heaven and hell are all in one's own mind.

All good men and women should ponder their future and the great matter of Birth and Death. Time passes swiftly and once the human body is lost, it cannot be recovered even in ten thousand eons. (8) It is like the sun and moon passing across the sky as fast as the fingers of weavers at the loom. Time cannot wait for you ... When the final moment comes, it will be too late for regrets, as they will do you no good. So you should all strive to cultivate.

The sutras teach that ordinary people, sages and saints are all equal. There is no difference [in their intrinsic nature]. Only the defilement or purity of mind is different. For this reason, it is said that "Mind, Buddhas and sentient beings are no different from one another." A Pure Mind is Buddha, a defiled mind is sentient being. Buddhas and sentient beings differ only in the extinction

or non-extinction of defilements of the mind.

The mind is inherently clean and pure, but it is obstructed by greed, hatred, stupidity, arrogance, the five desires and many kinds of delusions. Therefore, those with such minds are called sentient beings. If defilements are discarded and the mind becomes pure, that is Buddhahood. It is not necessary to depend on others.

However, all sentient beings bear heavy karma and stubborn afflictions from time immemorial, and these are very difficult to purify. To do so requires cultivation, such as [serene, reflective] meditation, working on a hua-t'ou or Buddha Recitation.(9) So you see, there are many expedient ways to practice, but all are medicines to treat the diseases of the mind. For example, a mirror, intrinsically bright, cannot reflect anything if it is covered with dust. To restore its brightness, a cleaning agent (remedy) is required. Yet the cleanser itself is also dust, though it can rid other things of dust. Once the mirror is bright, there is no further need for the cleanser. This is like gold in its ore, covered with the dirt and dust of sand and stone. After it is smelted and pure gold appears, there is no need to smelt it again.

It is difficult to rid oneself of the defiled mind characteristic of sentient beings. However, it can be done through diligent practice. When this is accomplished, the bright and undefiled mind appears. It is in this sense that all sentient beings are said to be inherently Buddhas. This does not mean that in the midst of afflictions and defilement, you can go around calling yourself a Buddha!

Sitting in meditation and working on a hua-t'ou are important methods for illuminating the mind. Unfortunately, very few people nowadays practice diligently enough. This is because they have shallow roots and cannot concentrate on practice. Furthermore, without a good teacher to direct them, they are easily led astray.

We should, therefore, practice both Buddha Recitation and Zen. This is a proper and safe approach. One who can practice Buddha Recitation and then observe where Amitabha Buddha comes from and where He goes will, over a period of time, come to understand what Amitabha Buddha represents. This will allow his innate, bright wisdom to flow forth. This is no different from meditating on a kung-an (koan) or hua-t'ou. But sincere practice and hard work are necessary.

If someone with false thoughts dismisses hard work, seeks leisure day in and day out and does not consider practice important, he will be confused until the end of his life. Anyone who thinks that laziness and false thoughts are enjoyable is not misleading himself in this life alone; even at the end of many eons he will still be in confusion.

If you have an affinity for Buddha Recitation, try to practice it. In the midst of afflictions and defilement, one utterance of the Buddha's name is like the proverbial gem that purifies even the most polluted water. As stated in the sutras: if you purify water by letting sand and mud settle to the bottom so that pure water appears, that is the first step toward overcoming "guest dust" afflictions. (10) When all sand and mud are removed and only pure water remains, that is the same as breaking away from all ignorance and delusion forever. Thus, you can practice Buddha Recitation silently by yourself without fear of the least mistake.

If you can really separate yourself from defilement or, as the sutras say, if the mind is pure and bright and you have arrived at the stage where you have no obstacles put in your way by "guest dust" afflictions, not only will Amitabha Buddha come to lead you to rebirth in the Pure Land, but all Buddhas throughout the Ten Directions will praise you.

The Important Dharma of Pure Land

The Dharma of Buddha Recitation is for the purpose of achieving rebirth in the Pure Land, thus ending the cycle of Birth and Death. This is a most crucial matter. Therefore, sentient beings are urged to practice Buddha Recitation. Unfortunately, people today understand only that Buddha Recitation can lead to the end of Birth and Death, without understanding where the root of Birth and Death lies. How should you practice Buddha Recitation so as to end the cycle of Birth and Death? If you do not sever the root of Birth and Death, how can you expect to end that cycle?

What is the root of Birth and Death? An ancient master has said:

If your evil karma were not heavy, you would not have been born in the Saha world. If love-attachment is not severed, you cannot be reborn in the Pure Land.

Therefore, we know that love-attachment is the root of Birth and Death. All sentient beings are subject to the suffering of Birth and Death because of the affliction of love-attachment. The root of this attachment does not come from this life alone, nor indeed from one, two, three or four previous lives. Rather it stems from time without beginning, birth after birth, death after death. Abandoning one life only to reappear in another life, we are always swayed by love-attachment, up to our present lifetime. Thinking back, when did you have a single thought not tied to this root of love-attachment?

The seeds of this love-attachment have accumulated over long eons and are planted very deep. Therefore, birth after birth, death after death, the cycle never stops. For now, you should direct your mind to Buddha Recitation, seeking only to be reborn in the Pure Land. If one part of your mind is geared to Buddha Recitation while the other is tied to Birth and Death, even if you continue this recitation until the final moment, you will only see that you are still rooted in love-attachment, still in the cycle of Birth and Death. At that time, you will realize that such Buddha Recitation is useless. You may then complain that Buddha Recitation does not bring results, but it will be too late for regrets.

I urge those who practice Buddha Recitation to understand first that love-attachment is the root of Birth and Death. Buddha Recitation requires that you sever love-attachment in thought after thought. During recitation at home, when you see your son or daughter or grandchildren, or your material possessions, you are attached to all of them. Thus, everything and every thought is a recipe for Birth and Death. You may recite the Buddha's name, but if the root of love-attachment is in your mind and you never lose this for one moment, you need not wonder why you cannot concentrate on it! (11)

When the mind is filled with attachments, Buddha Recitation remains superficial. One part of the mind is practicing Buddha Recitation while the other is increasingly filled with love-attachment. If thoughts of children and grandchildren are in the forefront of your mind, the mind trying to recite the Buddha's name cannot resist the mind of love, and thus you cannot sever love-attachment. This being so, how can you expect to put an end to the cycle of Birth and Death?

Because this condition of attachment stems from many previous lifetimes, for fruitful Buddha Recitation, just start in the present, even though you may not be wholly familiar with the method nor have a fully sincere mind. If you have no power and no control over yourself now, you will have no control during the final moments of your life either.

Therefore, I would like to urge all of you: if you really want to recite the Buddha's name and put an end to Birth and Death, 12) cut off the root of Birth and Death in thought after thought. Then, Birth and Death will end in thought after thought. It is not advisable to wait till the end of your life to do this. I urge you to do your best. Bear in mind that everything is Birth and Death. To end the cycle of Birth and Death in your current lifetime, concentrate on reciting the Buddha's name in thought after thought. If you practice like this every moment and still do not end the cycle of Birth and Death, then all the Buddhas would be lying. So whether you are a monk or a layman, just keep Birth and Death at the forefront of your mind. This is the method for ending Birth and Death and there is no more wonderful method than this.

Practice Buddha Recitation with your own mind. To recite the Buddha's name is to recite your own mind, thought after thought, without interruption. Buddha and Mind are the same. Both subject and object are still and empty. This is called reciting one's own mind, reciting one's own Buddha. If you miss one pure thought, you fall into the karma of demons.

Many people following the current fashion of Zen think of it as the supreme Dharma. They look down on Pure Land and do not practice it. Because they delight in fame, they learn some words and sentences from ancient sages so that they can talk smoothly and eulogize one another. The urge to enter the Dharma doors (i.e., to cultivate) is in decline. These people not only lack real practice, they even deprecate the Mahayana sutras, claiming that the sutras are mere words and need not be read. Though such persons may have some mundane knowledge, they cannot save themselves. It is really terrible. Most of them do not understand the Mahayana sutras, do not understand that there are many expedient methods for teaching sentient beings, do not know the meaning of the expression: "Everything returns to oneness, but there are many expedient methods that lead us to an understanding of the Truth." They only know that the Zen Patriarchs stressed Awakening. Yet the original intent of the awakened mind is to end Birth and Death. Is this not also the very purpose of Buddha Recitation?

Many Zen practitioners fail to escape the cycle of Birth and Death, while Pure Land followers find it easy to escape that cycle. What is the reason for this? It is because to practice Zen, you must stop the thought process, while to recite the Buddha's name, you must concentrate on pure thoughts. Since sentient beings have been mired in false thinking for untold eons, it is very difficult to detach themselves from it [and thus end the thought process]. Buddha Recitation, on the other hand, changes impure thoughts to pure thoughts, fighting poison with poison to purify one's own thoughts. 13)Therefore, in Zen practice it is difficult to attain Awakening, while Buddha Recitation makes it easy to reach that goal. If you really want to end Birth and Death in one lifetime, concentrate on Buddha Recitation. There is no need to worry any further.

People today think of the Dharma of Pure Land as an expedient teaching. Little do they realize that it is also a wonderful teaching. Take the Great Bodhisattva Samantabhadra, whose teaching encompasses the whole Dharma Realm (cosmos). He made ten Great Vows directed toward the Pure Land. The Patriarch Asvaghosa relied on numerous Mahayana sutras to write the Treatise on the Awakening of the Faith, showing sentient beings the way to the Pure Land. Zen patriarchs in China are involved in transmission of the lamp (Mind-to-Mind transmission). While they may not always refer to the Pure Land, if after becoming awakened and bringing an end to the cycle of Birth and Death, they do not turn to the Pure Land, would that not be nihilism?

The eminent Zen Master Yung-Ming collected passages from the entire Tripitaka (Buddhist Canon) demonstrating that to point to the Mind is to return to the Pure Land. During the Dharma-Ending Age, many Zen masters glorify the Western Pure Land. Moreover, the Pure Land Dharma was preached by Sakyamuni Buddha himself without being requested and is extolled by all Buddhas throughout the Ten Directions. Are not the Buddhas, Bodhisattvas and Patriarchs more worthy than a few defiled sentient beings?

One who really wants to practice Pure Land should not consult others. He should only ask himself how serious he is about Birth and Death. If he is as serious about ending Birth and Death as he is about extinguishing a fire on his head, then he must resolve to devote all his energies to solving this problem.

For example, if a person becomes hopelessly ill, suffering greatly, and someone should find a panacea that will treat this illness, and if this person is of the right frame of mind, believes in this medicine and takes it right away, letting the body sweat out its ills, he will recover quickly. He will then naturally believe that this is a wonderful medicine. Similarly, anyone who sincerely believes in the Dharma of Pure Land and practices Buddha Recitation until the final moment will discover that it is true and wonderful. It is not necessary to ask others.

I urge all of you to exert yourself and not be misled.

People Should Practice Pure Land

Buddha Sakyamuni said: "There are many expedient ways to cultivate, and each can lead to an end to the cycle of Birth and Death. Reciting the Buddha's name seeking rebirth in the Pure Land is a shortcut." (14) The wonderful and complete teachings of the Avatamsaka and Lotus sutras, as well as the sublime conduct of the Bodhisattva Samantabhadra, all point to and lead to the Pure Land. Similarly, from the Patriarchs Asvaghosa and Nagarjuna to the great Chinese masters Yung-Ming and Chung-Feng, all are in favor of Pure Land.

This Dharma has been adopted by people of all capacities and by the Fourfold Assembly (monks, nuns, laymen and laywomen). It can be practiced to good effect by all people whether of dull or

sharp capacities. It is not limited to those who are not of the deepest roots.

It is taught in the sutras that if you want to purify the Buddha land, you should purify your own mind first. If you want to have pure karma, you must first purify your own mind. To purify your own mind, you should first maintain pure discipline (keep the precepts). (15) Given the three evils of the body, four evils of speech and three evils of the mind, there are altogether ten evil karmas which are the causes of suffering in the Triple Realm.

From now on, you must maintain the rules of discipline and keep the three karmas of body, speech and mind pure and clean. Then the mind will be naturally pure. If you do not kill sentient beings, steal or commit adultery, then the karma of body will be pure. If you do not tell lies or use deceitful double meanings and do not indulge in coarse language or frivolous chatter, then the karma of speech will be pure. If you do not allow into mind feelings of covetousness and anger and do not hold perverted views, then the karma of mind will be pure. If you can sever the ten evil karmas forever, the Triple Realm will be cleansed and purified. This is very important for the purification of your own mind.

Once you have a clean and pure mind and have developed an abhorrence for the sufferings of the Saha World, make a vow for rebirth in the Pure Land. Then, practice the right action of Buddha Recitation for the purpose of ending Birth and Death. Block all distractions from outside and concentrate singlemindedly on reciting Amitabha Buddha's name in thought after thought twenty-four hours a day, as though your life depended on it. While you are walking, standing, sitting or reclining, whether you are moving or still, at leisure or busy, you must always be of clear mind without any confused thoughts and must not be affected by intruding conditions from outside. If you can practice over a long period of time, never forgetting Buddha Recitation even in your dreams, reciting gently and continuously, whether asleep or awake, without any distracting thoughts, the realm of the Pure Land will appear before you at the time of death. Then, as a matter of course, you will no longer be bound by the cycle of Birth and Death. Amitabha Buddha will respond by emitting rays of light and lead you to rebirth in the Pure Land.

Singleminded recitation of the Buddha's name is correct action. However, visualization is also needed to make your cultivation more solid. TheMeditation Sutra [a basic Pure Land text] states:

Sakyamuni Buddha taught sixteen wonderful visualizations to Queen Vaidehi, so that she could

attain rebirth in the Pure Land within one lifetime.

When cultivating alone or in the company of friends, choose one of the sixteen visualizations, depending on your purpose and vows. You may visualize only Buddha Amitabha and the Bodhisattvas or else the realm of the Pure Land with its golden ground and wonderful lotus blossoms. If you keep the object of visualization clearly in mind twenty-four hours a day, whether walking, standing, sitting or reclining, with eyes open or closed, the pure realm will always appear before you.

If you can accomplish this, all you need is one recitation of the Buddha's name at the time of death to achieve immediate rebirth in the Pure Land.

It has been said that:

To be born [in the Pure Land] is definitely to be born, but to return [to the Pure Land] is not really to return.

This is the wonderful doctrine of Mind-Only Pure Land. (16) If one applies himself in this way, with rigorous discipline, his six senses will be clean and pure, and he will sever evil karma and defilements forever. With the mind-ground pure, visualization and recitation follow in succession and wonderful practice is easily accomplished. The true cause of [rebirth in] the Pure Land is none other than this.

Conversely, as Sakyamuni Buddha taught, if the practitioner only talks about Buddha Recitation and rebirth in the Pure Land but does not hold to the necessary discipline or sever afflictions -- while constantly having defiled thoughts and an evil mind -- he can never succeed. For this reason, he should maintain discipline as the foundation, make a vow as a contributing factor and engage in Buddha Recitation or visualization as correct practice. If the practitioner cultivates in this manner and does not achieve rebirth in the Pure Land, Buddha Sakyamuni would be guilty of false speech.

The Important Doctrines of

Those who engage in the [dual practice] of Buddha Recitation and Zen should take the name of Amitabha Buddha as a hua-t'ou [or kung-an]. During Buddha Recitation, you should ask "who is it that recites the Buddha's name?" If you ask and investigate again and again, there will come a time when all false thoughts suddenly cease. No such thoughts can arise, or if they do, they will be quickly suppressed. You will have only a single, clear thought, like a bright sun in the sky, and never engender any false thought. The confused mind will reign no more. Rather, you will experience stillness and awareness. The Great Master Yung-Chia said:

To be still and alert is correct, while to be still and unaware of what is going on around you is wrong. To be alert and still is correct, while to be alert but filled with disturbing thoughts is wrong.

If stillness does not lead to lack of mindfulness and awareness does not lead to confused thinking, then awareness and stillness will flow together. You let go of both "sinking" and "floating" until not a single thought arises in mind, not of past, present or future; then, suddenly the pitch blackness cracks and you see your Original Face. Body, mind and world are immediately at peace, like illusory flowers falling from the sky. (17) Everything in the Ten Directions is bright because a great light is shining everywhere.

When you arrive at this stage, this complete brightness is always present in your daily life and you will no longer have any doubts. You will believe your own mind, which is intrinsically thus. (18) Then your mind is no different from the Buddhas' and Patriarchs'. When you reach this level, you will no longer grasp at Emptiness. If you grasp at Emptiness, you will fall into evil and heterodox views. Nor will you grasp at Existence or at the Wonderful. If you grasp at Existence, you will also fall into evil ways.

If during practice, you find some realm, whether wholesome or evil, appearing in the mind, you must not grasp at it but just let it be. Then the realm will vanish. You should neither fear evil realms nor take delight in auspicious realms when they appear, for this is the action of demons. If worry or joy arise, these are the views of demons. You should understand that these realms come from your own mind and not from outside. You must understand that our minds are intrinsically clean and pure, without a single dharma, neither confused nor awakened. We belong neither to this world nor to the realm of the holy, nor to any other realm. But, because we are at present confused, we must cultivate to reduce ignorance and bad habits.

If anyone could open up his own mind -- originally bright, all-encompassing, clean and pure -- that would be Wonderful Suchness and there would be no need for practice. However, because today's cultivators have not yet seen their Self-Nature (Mind), they must practice diligently in order to reach the stage where they can end the cycle of Birth and Death.

Buddha Sakyamuni taught the Dharma of Mind. There are countless Dharma methods, but they are all for the purpose of awakening the mind. The very important method of Zen has been established by some Patriarchs, but Buddha Sakyamuni Himself taught the Bodhisattvas of the Three Worthy Positions and the Ten Stages [that is, all Bodhisattvas] the crucial method of Buddha Recitation to attain Buddhahood. In short, practice Buddha Recitation to become a Buddha. The Bodhisattvas of the Ten Stages have already attained the level of True Thusness. Can you say that they are not awakened? Yet even they can never depart from Mindfulness of the Buddhas, the Dharma and the Sangha. (Mindfulness of the Buddhas = Buddha Recitation; see also note 29).

[In the Avatamsaka Sutra,] the youth Sudhana visited fifty-three Good Spiritual Advisors. The first was the monk Cloud of Virtue, who taught him the liberation method of Buddha Recitation. The last one he visited was the Bodhisattva Samantabhadra, who taught him that to attain Wonderful Enlightenment, he need only turn towards the Western Pure Land, behold the Tathagata of Infinite Light (Amitabha Buddha) and receive a prediction of Enlightenment. Take note of this: even the supreme teaching of the Avatamsaka Sutra, which encompasses the entire Dharma realm, also promotes Buddha Recitation. The Bodhisattvas of the Ten Stages, even those who have already attained True Thusness, still practice mindfulness of the Buddhas (Buddha Recitation).

There are those in this Dharma-Ending Age who dare to deprecate Buddha Recitation as an inferior practice. But why should they think that Zen and Pure Land are different? Such people lack knowledge and fail to understand the intent of the Buddhas. They are creating a false dichotomy. According to Mind-Only Pure Land, if the mind is pure, the land is pure. Therefore, if you are a beginning Zen practitioner and have not yet awakened, unless you engage in Buddha Recitation, you have no means of purifying your mind. (19) But, a pure mind is precisely an awakened mind.

Even Bodhisattvas who are already awakened still practice Buddha Recitation, because without Buddha Recitation (mindfulness of the Buddhas) they cannot attain correct Enlightenment [see Glossary, "Awakening vs. Enlightenment"]. We know that the Patriarchs awakened their minds through mindfulness of the Buddhas. Anyone who practices Buddha Recitation singlemindedly and

without distraction will find that all afflictions vanish. With their minds thus bright, they are called awakened. Look at it this way: Buddha Recitation is Zen. No Bodhisattva abandons mindfulness of the Buddhas after awakening. None of the Patriarchs abandoned the Pure Land either. Thus, Buddha Recitation is Zen, Zen is Buddha Recitation.

Since ancient times, this question has remained unsettled; I want to speak out now and shatter the view that Pure Land and Zen are different. If all the Buddhas were to appear in the world, they would say the same thing: to abandon this Pure Land Dharma and embrace false words is the work of demons and not the true Dharma.

Pure Land Can Save All Sentient Beings in the Ocean of Suffering

Buddha Sakyamuni specially taught the Pure Land Dharma to rescue all sentient beings in the Saha world. He enjoined people to recite Amitabha Buddha's name and make a vow for rebirth in the Pure Land. This wonderful Dharma was taught in the Amitabha Sutra and extolled by all the Buddhas in the Ten Directions. Pure Land is a special teaching (20) adapted to all sentient beings in this Dharma-Ending Age.

There are many different methods of Pure Land practice. If a group of people practice together in a temple, there is a procedure set forth in the Pure Land commentaries. An individual who practices the Dharma of Pure Land alone bows to the Buddhas and recites either the Amitabha or the Diamond Sutra once each session. He then recites Amitabha Buddha's name five to ten thousand times, after which he makes a vow to be reborn in the Pure Land, saying:

I wish to be reborn in the Western Pure Land, with the nine grades of lotus blossoms as my parents. When the lotuses are in full bloom, I shall see Buddha Amitabha and be enlightened to the Absolute Truth, with non-retrogressing Bodhisattvas as my companions.

This is done in the morning and then in exactly the same manner in the evening.

Apart from these sessions, during the entire day, the practitioner just recites the Buddha's name and keeps Buddha Amitabha in mind, in thought after thought, without interruption, holding the name of Amitabha as his very life. Whether walking, standing, sitting or reclining, he always recites Buddha Amitabha's name. If he should meet with adversity or favorable circumstances and is moved to anger or happiness, he need only concentrate on reciting Buddha Amitabha's name for

the anger and defilement to cease.

Since defilement is the root of Birth and Death, the practitioner should recite the Buddha's name to rid himself of defilement and avert the suffering of Birth and Death. If one who recites the Buddha's name rids himself of defilement, he can end the cycle of Birth and Death. If he can overcome defilement during Buddha Recitation, he can overcome it in his dreams. If he can overcome it in his dreams, he can overcome it during illness as well. And if he can overcome defilement when ill, he can overcome it in his final moments. Thus it is very clear that he will be reborn in the Pure Land.

This is not difficult, but a sincere, earnest mind is necessary for ending the cycle of Birth and Death. In reciting Amitabha Buddha's name, think of nothing else over an extended period of time, and you will then obtain peace, freedom and bliss beyond anything found in this world. All practitioners should understand this method. Anyone who can recite the Buddha's name and practice the Dharma is a true practitioner. Anyone who abandons this method will find no better way to achieve this goal.

Do not listen to people with false teachings, lest you develop wrong views. There is a wonderful method that I would like to teach all of you: picture a great lotus, shaped like a wheel and colored blue, yellow, red or white. During meditation and Buddha Recitation, always visualize this lotus blossom clearly. Also, think of yourself as sitting on this lotus seat. Think about Amitabha Buddha emitting light, illuminating your own body. While visualizing, do not be bound by walking, standing, sitting or reclining positions. Also, do not be bound by time. Just visualize the Pure Land clearly. Whether your eyes are open or closed, the image should never be blurred. Even in your dreams you should still see Amitabha Buddha, the Bodhisattvas Avalokitesvara (Kuan Yin) and Mahasthamaprapta (Shih Chih) and all other Bodhisattvas sitting each on his own lotus blossom -- all radiant and clear.

If the practitioner can visualize the lotus with complete concentration until the final moment, he can end the cycle of Birth and Death. At the time of death, the lotus will appear before him and he will see himself seated upon it. He will also see the three Pure Land Sages, Amitabha, Avalokitesvara and Mahasthamaprapta, coming to lead him to rebirth in the Western Pure Land -- never to return to the Saha world, never again to endure the suffering of Birth and Death.

Anyone who practices the Dharma of Pure Land with utmost sincerity will achieve rebirth in the Pure Land in one lifetime. This is not the personal view of this old monk. It is stated many times in the sutras that this is a direct method and the shortest route to the Pure Land. (21) One need only take the shortcut of reciting the Buddha's name. Anyone who abandons this wonderful Dharma has

no better path to follow.

The Reason for Teaching the

Dharma of Pure Land

There are three Vehicles in the Dharma [the paths of the Sravakas, Pratyeka Buddhas and Bodhisattvas/Buddhas] for people to study and practice. But my fear about all of them is that if the practitioner cannot achieve results in one lifetime, he may drown in the ocean of Birth and Death, unable to escape.

Zen practitioners may end the cycle of Birth and Death in one lifetime. But too many false thoughts and deeply ingrained habits make it difficult to practice Zen.

If one does not attain Enlightenment in this life, he will continue to revolve in the cycle of Birth and Death. Therefore, Sakyamuni Buddha taught the Dharma of Pure Land. It does not matter if one is of superior, average or limited capacities. It does not matter if one is wealthy and in high position, or destitute and humble. As long as he practices this Dharma, he is assured of results in one lifetime. There is no other more expedient or wonderful Dharma than this shortcut of Buddha Recitation.

Why? It is because when we remain in this Saha world, we are in a world filled with suffering. There is the suffering of birth, the suffering of old age, the suffering of disease, the suffering of death, the suffering of unfulfilled wishes, the suffering of meeting with the uncongenial, and so forth; there are so many kinds of suffering. In short, these sufferings are indescribable. Even when a person of high position and wealth seems to find the joys of life, they are all the causes of future suffering. (22)

Because all this suffering in the Saha world is very difficult to escape, Sakyamuni Buddha taught the Dharma of Pure Land. In that land all beings live free from suffering and enjoy every bliss; therefore it is called the Land of Utmost Bliss. Because that realm is without defilement, it is called the Pure Land. All beings are born from a lotus blossom; therefore, there is no suffering of birth. All beings have infinite life; therefore, there is no suffering of old age and death. Food and clothing are provided naturally; therefore, there is no suffering of unfulfilled wishes. Because one is able to join the company of superior beings all gathered in one place, there is no suffering of meeting with the uncongenial. Because that Land is adorned with the Seven Treasures, it is not defiled by rubble or thorns. All this is stated in the Amitabha Sutra and every single detail is true. Those who wish to be reborn in the Pure Land need only concentrate singlemindedly on reciting the Buddha's name,

while dedicating all the merits and virtues accumulated day after day toward achieving this goal.

For correct practice, during recitation visualize yourself seated on a lotus blossom. Then, in your final moment, a great lotus will appear before you and you will see Amitabha Buddha emitting light, arriving to lead you to the Pure Land. All you need at that time is a single recitation of Amitabha Buddha's name to achieve rebirth in the Pure Land. You will never again retrogress or drown in the ocean of Birth and Death. This is the result of practicing Pure Land and obtaining the merits of Buddha Recitation.

One who sincerely recites the Buddha's name will not find it necessary to seek Awakening or to see his Self-Nature. It is necessary only to visualize Amitabha Buddha or recite His name. Making donations and offerings to the Three Treasures (Buddha, Dharma, Sangha), as well as accruing other merits by adorning the Buddha lands, are only supporting activities.

However, even if you practice Buddha Recitation and make a vow for rebirth in the Western Pure Land, you must still sever the roots of Birth and Death to ensure rebirth. What are the roots of Birth and Death? Greed and grasping at everything in the world. Many things that bring enjoyment, such as beautiful colors, pleasant sounds, flavors and bodily comforts are causes of suffering. Other causes are anger, hatred, grasping and the delusions of heterodox teachings. Do not believe in them at all. You need only concentrate on Buddha Recitation, recite the Amitabha Sutra twice a day and the Buddha's name a few thousand times or [if you are very fervent] more than ten thousand times, in thought after thought without interruption. This is thehua-t'ou and this is your Original Face.

You might ask, what is life and what comes after death? Those who creates evil causes in life will find the evil realms appearing before them after death. But those who recite the Buddha's name seeking rebirth in the Pure Land will, in their final moments, see the realm of Amitabha Buddha, the Pure Land, appearing before them. The Surangama Sutra states clearly: "Anything that has form is illusory." This is a Zen teaching. All you need is to have a pure, true mind and not be attached to anything -- for all phenomena are illusory.

To practice Zen, you must sever all false thoughts, and that is very difficult. To practice Pure Land is to use pure thoughts to transform impure thoughts. When the lotus blossom appears, that is the perfection of your visualization.

There are countless expedient methods, but according to the Buddhas and Patriarchs, the Dharma of Pure Land is particularly important. It is not necessary to understand your own mind or to see your Self-Nature. It is only necessary to recite the Buddha's name. The word "Buddha" means enlightened. If you recite the Buddha's name in thought after thought, never forgetting Him for an instant, then, every thought is an enlightened thought. If your mind forgets Amitabha Buddha, that is not Enlightenment. If you can engage in Buddha Recitation in your dreams as you do in the daytime, that is constant Enlightenment. If your mind is not confused in the present, it will not be confused in your final moments, and you will certainly be reborn in the Pure Land.

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