

Introduction To Buddhism Series

Lecture 11 – The Pure Land School



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□ The Three Sutras and One Treatise

- *Aparimitayur Sutra – Infinite Life Sutra (無量壽經)*
 - ➔ Explains how Amitabha Buddha's land, the Western Pure Land, was formed.
 - ➔ Tells the causes and conditions Amitabha Buddha planted for creating the Land of Ultimate Bliss.
- *Sukhavati-vyuha Sutra – Amitabha Sutra (阿彌陀經)*
 - ➔ Told us the living and cultivation conditions of the Western Pure Land.
 - ➔ Told us the results produced from the causes/conditions Amitabha Buddha planted.
- *Amitayur Dhyana Sutra – Visualization Sutra (觀無量壽經)*
 - ➔ Provides sixteen Buddha-remembrance methods to cultivate in order to be reborn in the Land of Ultimate Bliss
 - ➔ The prerequisites for rebirth are the Three Virtuous Conditions
- *The Rebirth Treatise (往生論)*

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□ Sutras Added Later to Pure Land School

- The “*Chapter of the Practice and Vows of Samantabhadra Boddhisattva*” – in the *Avatamsaka Sutra*
(華嚴經普賢菩薩行願品)
- The “*Chapter of the Perfect and Complete Realization of Buddha-remembrance by Mahasthamaprapta Boddhisattva*” – in the *Shurangama Sutra*
(大佛頂首楞嚴經大勢至菩薩念佛圓通章)

□ The Formation of the Pure Land School

- No counterpart in India
- Established by Patriarch Hui Yuan (慧遠) in Eastern Tsin dynasty (東晉) – the Tung Lin Temple (東林寺)
- Promoted by patriarchs and masters in later generations; the most recent patriarch was Master Yin Guang (印光大師)
- Is the most popular Buddhist practice in China. (in Dr. J. C. Cleary’s research)

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□ Why Pure Land?

- Sentient beings in the Dharma-ending age have severe karmic obstacles and hindrances.
- Tempting conditions in the Dharma-ending age are very powerful and harmful to cultivation.
- Buddha Sakyamuni taught us an expedient cultivation method to help us attain rebirth in Amitabha Buddha's land and cross/leave the ocean of sufferings forever.
 - ➔ Believed to be in the Vaipulya Period (方等時)
 - ➔ Repeated many times – *Aparimitayur Sutra (Infinite Life Sutra)*
 - There are five translated versions in Chinese.
 - Version variations are not due to translations, but due to content differences (i.e., taught to different audiences).
 - This reflects how important this school is in Buddha Sakyamuni's teaching!

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□ What's unique about the Pure Land school?

- Rely on two “powers” or “forces”:
 - ➔ That by oneself – the push (自力)
 - ➔ That of Amitabha Buddha – the pull (他力)
- Method is simple
 - ➔ Be mindful and uphold Buddha's name – Recite Amitabha or Amittuofo
 - ➔ Suitable for everyone – regardless of one's ability
 - ➔ Allow us to be reborn in the Pure Land with our karmas uncleansed
- Western Pure Land is the Land of Ultimate Bliss – surpassing all other Buddha lands
 - ➔ Superior living conditions
 - ➔ Superior learning and cultivation environment to allow us to attain Buddhahood in one lifespan
- The most effective cultivation method in the Dharma-ending age
 - ➔ Mentioned in the *Sutra of Great Assembly* (大集經)

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□ What are the essentials of Pure Land School besides the core Dharma curriculums?

- The **push** by oneself (自力)
 - ➔ Deep belief (深信)
 - ➔ Unwavering vow (切願)
 - ➔ Diligent cultivation (力行)
- The **pull** from Amitabha Buddha (他力)
 - ➔ The forty-eight great compassionate vows (四十八願)
 - ➔ In particular, the eighteenth great compassionate vow (特別是第十八願)

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□ The **push** by oneself first (自力)

➤ Deep belief (深信) – Build faith in myself

➔ There is no distinction between a deluded mind, a Buddha, and deluded beings. (心、佛、眾生三無差別)

– **I am a future Buddha.**

– Amitabha Buddha is an existing Buddha.

– Our enlightenment nature is the same.

– Although I am severely deluded now, **the enlightenment within has never been lost.** Although I am re-cycling within the Samsara, **the enlightenment within has never changed.**

➔ I am a Buddha in theory and Amitabha is a real Buddha. Although our enlightenment nature is the same, I am far from attaining it.

(我是理性佛、名字佛，佛陀是究竟佛；性雖無二，位乃天淵。)

– If I am not mindfully vowing to be reborn to his Buddha Land, I will be bound to being driven by my karma and re-cycling endlessly through Samsara.

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□ The push by oneself first (自力) (Cont'd)

- Deep belief (深信) – Build faith in oneself
 - ➔ There is no distinction between a deluded mind and the Buddha-nature.
 - ➔ Since they are not different, they will resonate just like magnetic objects attracted to each other.
 - ➔ As long as we can be mindful of Buddha continuously, sooner or later we will see the Buddha and thus become a Buddha.
- Unwavering vows (切願)
 - ➔ Recognize that the Saha world is full of sufferings and vow to leave it.
 - ➔ Dropping all worldly bindings – fame, money, power, social status, etc.
 - ➔ Make every one of the forty-eight vows our own vow – resonating with those of Amitabha Buddha.
 - ➔ The only goal is to be reborn in Amitabha Buddha's Pure Land at the end of my present life.

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□ The push by oneself first (自力) (Cont'd)

➤ Diligent cultivation (力行)

- ➔ Collect the six faculties and let the pure mind be continuous in all of them. (“Chapter of the Perfect and Complete Realization of Buddha-remembrance by *Mahasthamaprapta Bodhisattva*” in the *Shurangama Sutra*,
都攝六根，淨念相繼－楞嚴經大勢至菩薩念佛圓通章)
- ➔ Sixteen methods were taught in the *Amitayur Dhyana Sutra* (*Visualization Sutra 觀無量壽經*).
- ➔ Buddha-name chanting (持名念佛) is the most commonly used method in Pure Land school practice.

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□ The **push** by oneself first (自力) (Cont'd)

➤ Diligent cultivation (力行)

➔ “When practicing Buddha name chanting, the most important thing is to keep our minds continuously focused and without distraction. It is not necessary to chant rapidly. Chant comfortably—neither too slowly nor too quickly. Continuously and clearly, let the Buddha’s name flow through our minds. If we can mindfully chant the Buddha’s name in this way, even during our daily activities, then we can said to be diligent in Buddha-name chanting.” (Patriarch Shin Cheh)

持名貴在一心不亂，無間無雜，非必以快念多念為勝也。但不緩不急，密密持名，使心中佛號，歷歷分明。著衣吃飯，行住坐臥，一句洪名，綿密不斷，如是持名，可謂事上能一心精進矣。(行策大師警語)

➔ Buddha-name Chanting resonates with the **pull** from Amitabha Buddha.

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□ The **push** by oneself first (自力) (Cont'd)

➤ Diligent cultivation (力行)

➔ Buddha-name Chanting encompasses the core of all cultivation methods

- Precepts: collects all thoughts into one; therefore, all evil thoughts are eradicated
- Dhyana: concentrates on one; therefore detaches from all others and achieves a single and undisturbed mind
- Prajna: arises when Dhyana is truly attained

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□ The pull from Amitabha Buddha (他力)

- Bhikkhu Dharmakara (法藏比丘) made his forty-eight great compassionate vows to create a pure and clear Buddha land for sentient beings in all directions to cultivate and attain Buddhahood.
- He also vowed that only if all his vows were fulfilled would he take the name of a Buddha.
- The forty-eight vows fully supports one another and not a single vow can be standalone and still function.
- **In particular, the eighteenth vow supported by all other forty-seven says clearly that if one deeply believes and vows to be reborn in the Pure Land, and sincerely chant his name for ten times, the one's vow will be fulfilled.**
(設我得佛，十方眾生至心信樂欲生我國，乃至十念，若不生者，不取正覺)
- **This is the pull from Amitabha Buddha.**

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□ The great compassion of Amitabha Buddha

➤ Enables us to be reborn to the Pure Land with karmic sins not totally cleansed (帶業往生)

➔ Embraces people with abilities and karmic obstacles at all levels as long as we mindfully chant Amitufo.

➔ What does it mean by “with karmic sins not totally cleansed”?

(帶業往生的真實義)

- One who cultivates such that the karmic wrongdoings in the past no longer function; in other words, they are held in abeyance.
- One must not commit new karmic wrongdoings from the time one makes the vow to be reborn in Pure Land.

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❑ The great compassion of Amitabha Buddha

➤ Enables us to be reborn to the Pure Land with karmic sins not totally cleansed (帶業往生)

➔ Nine categories in three classes of rebirth, driven by our remaining karmic obstacles

- Upper class (上品) – for people who understand and “get it”
- Middle class (中品) – for people who cultivated good deeds and uphold the precepts
- Lower class (下品) – for people who **sincerely repented** their wrongdoings at the time of their last breath and wish to be reborn in his Buddha Land

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❑ The great compassion of Amitabha Buddha

➤ Enables us to be reborn to the Pure Land with karmic sins not totally cleansed (帶業往生)

➔ However, people who committed to the following **five severe karmic sins and did not sincerely repent** are excluded:

- Those who killed their father (殺父)
- Those who killed their mother (殺母)
- Those who killed an Arahant (殺阿羅漢)
- Those who disrupted the harmony of the Sangha (破和合僧)
- Those who shed the blood of a Buddha (出佛身血)

➤ “Emit my aura of wisdom over all lands in ten directions” (願我智慧光，普照十方刹)

➔ It's the strongest aura of all Buddhas'; Buddha Sakyamuni told us.

➔ It's up to us whether we can receive it, in other words, resonate with his aura.

➤ Patriarchs said Amitabha Buddha is sailing a voyage of compassion in the sea of sufferings all the time (苦海做慈航)

➔ He is ready to welcome and escort us to the Pure Land at any time.

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□ The great compassion of Amitabha Buddha (Cont'd)

- Buddha Sakyamuni praised Amitabha Buddha and the Pure Land and urged us three times to vow to be reborn in the Pure Land in *Sukhavati-vyuha Sutra – Amitabha Sutra* 阿彌陀經.
- “... those who have cultivated good deeds and believe in Amitabha Buddha should vow to be reborn in Amitabha Buddha’s land”
“... 諸善男子善女人，若有信者，應當發願，生彼國土”
- “If a person has made, is making, or will make the vow to be reborn in Amitabha Buddha’s land, this person will not retrogress on the path, thereby attaining anuttara-samyak-sambodhi, and has attained, is attaining, or will attain rebirth in Amitabha Buddha’s land”
“若有人已發願，今發願，當發願，欲生阿彌陀佛國者，是諸人等皆得不退轉於阿耨多羅三藐三菩提，於彼國土若已生，若今生，若當生”

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□ The great compassion of Amitabha Buddha (Cont'd)

➤ “If a person, man or woman, who have cultivated good deeds and heard about and believed in Amitabha Buddha, can uphold and recite the name of Amitabha Buddha singlemindedly for a period of one or two up to seven days; at about the end of this person’s life, Amitabha Buddha and a multitude of sages will appear before him. As the person dies, his mind will not be deluded, and he will attain rebirth in Amitabha Buddha’s Land of Ultimate Bliss”

“若有善男子善女人，聞說阿彌陀佛，執持名號，若一日，若二日，若三日，若四日，若五日，若六日，若七日，一心不亂，其人臨命終時，阿彌陀佛與諸聖眾現在其前，是人終時，心不顛倒，即得往生阿彌陀佛極樂國土。”

➤ All Buddhas in the ten directions also praise Amitabha Buddha and the Pure Land and urge all of us to make unwavering vows to be reborn in the Pure Land.