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# **The Amitabha Sutra and the Pure Land School**

It is said in the Buddhist sutras that, “Thousands of sutras and tens of thousands of discourses all point to the Land of Ultimate Bliss.” The Pure Land School of Buddhism is always highly regarded by members of all Buddhist sects and by those who follow different courses of cultivation.

## **I. The Beginning of the Pure Land School of Buddhism**

During the time of the Buddha, there was a king called King Bimbisara who was incarcerated by his son, Prince Ajatasatru. Even the king’s wife, Queen Vaidehi, was prohibited from seeing him. Prince

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Ajatasatru, a cruel man, was not a filial son. In order to seize the throne, he locked up his father and deprived him of food. Under these trying circumstances, King Bimbisara was sad and despondent. He was dismayed at being in this saha world of the five impurities—a place full of unbearable anguish, teeming with hungry ghosts and suffering animals. Faced with this world where suffering abounds he thought to himself, “Oh, Lord Buddha! Why do you not come to my aid during this difficult time of my life? Can you show me a sanctuary where I can rest my weary self?”

In the meantime, Queen Vaidehi, who had repeatedly asked to see her king, was finally allowed to visit him. Prince Ajatasatru, however, forbade her to bring the starving King any food. In desperation, the Queen painted her body with a layer of flour paste in the hope that the paste might provide the king with some relief. At such a time of anguish and despair, the two of them prayed to the Buddha for his compassion and guidance. To their amazement, the Buddha supernaturally appeared before them. The Buddha told the King and Queen, “To the west of this saha world, more than a hundred thousand million Buddha lands, there is a world called ‘Ultimate Bliss’

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where the teacher of the land, Amitabha Buddha, is currently teaching the Dharma. In the land of Amitabha Buddha, the most serene, secure, and happy place, there is no suffering, only happiness. If you recite the name of Amitabha with single-mindedness, Amitabha Buddha will use the strength of his great vow to receive you to be reborn in the Pure Land.”

After listening to the guidance of the Buddha, King Bimbisara and Queen Vaidehi started to recite the name of Amitabha Buddha. In the course of their praying, a radiant pure land did indeed appear before their eyes. This is the Pure Land of Amitabha Buddha and it is now called “The World of Ultimate Bliss.” This marks the beginning of the Pure Land School of Buddhism.

## **II. The Basis of the Pure Land School of Buddhism**

The existence of the Pure Land is not just recognized by the Pure Land School itself, mentioned only in the Pure Land sacred texts of three sutras and one sastra—*Sukhavativyuha Sutra*, *Amitayus Sutra*, *Amitabha Sutra*, and *Pure Land Sastra*, but in fact, most of the Mahayana sutras and sastras have

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often mentioned the Pure Land teachings, practice, and Dharma method.

**A. We know of the existence of the Pure Land through the sacred words of the Buddha**

The existence of an object cannot be determined simply by saying it does or does not exist. We need to make the correct assessment before we can objectively determine the existence of an object. For example no one would refute that there is a desk here; it is here for all to see. This is called direct inference. To determine the length of an object, we need to measure it with a ruler; to determine the weight of an object, we need to weigh it with a scale. These kinds of measurements are called comparative inferences. Another kind of assessment we can make to determine if something exists or not is by drawing inferences from the sacred words of sages. Sages are people of great wisdom; their words are unerring and are worthy of our trust. This type of assessment is called inference from the sacred words of sages.

We learn of the existence of the Pure Land through the words of the Buddha. In the *Amitabha Sutra*, the Buddha said, “More than a hundred thou-

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sand million Buddha lands beyond the saha world is a world called ‘Ultimate Bliss.’ In this world, there is a Buddha called Amitabha Buddha, who is currently teaching the Dharma.” The Buddha is a holy person who speaks the truth and his words are trustworthy. One of the Buddha’s thirty-two marks of excellence was his broad, long tongue, which was the result of never speaking falsely. When extended, it could cover his nose and face. Thus, when the Buddha told us that there is a pure land of ultimate bliss in this universe, we can most definitely believe that it exists.

**B. We know of the existence of the Pure Land through historical records of people being reborn there**

The *Record of the Sages of the Pure Land*, a three-volume work compiled in the Qing Dynasty, contained many cases of old masters throughout history who practiced the Pure Land School of Buddhism and were reborn in the Pure Land. For example, there was the case of Master Huiyuan, the Founding Patriarch of the Pure Land School. He practiced mindfulness of Amitabha Buddha and

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personally witnessed the manifestation of Amitabha Buddha on three separate occasions.

There was a record about Master Shandao, a monk during the Tang Dynasty, who would emanate a ray of light from his mouth every time he recited the name of Amitabha Buddha. Ten times he recited the name of Amitabha Buddha, ten rays of light emanated from his mouth. A hundred times he recited the name of Amitabha Buddha, a hundred rays of light emanated from his mouth. Because of this, he was also called the Monk of Brightness.

In more recent times, there is the example of Master Yinguang who recited the name of Amitabha Buddha all his life and was able to foretell the time of his passing. There were also many cases of secular men and women who recited the name of Amitabha Buddha and were reborn in the Pure Land. In 1948, a layman, Wu Songnian, informed his family and friends that he would pass away at eight the next morning and asked them to come to his house to help him recite the name of Amitabha Buddha at the moment of his passing. When everyone arrived at his house the following morning, he was eating his breakfast as usual and did not look like someone who

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was about to pass away. However, just before 8:00 a.m., he sat in a lotus position and passed away in the midst of his family and friends chanting the name of Amitabha Buddha.

There are many records of people throughout history who practiced mindfulness of Amitabha Buddha and were able to foretell the time of their passings. Some could see Amitabha Buddha coming to welcome them, others could hear delightful music in the air, and some others could smell soothing fragrances in the room. Any Pure Land practitioners who have attained perfection in their mindfulness of Amitabha Buddha and are reborn in the Pure Land can experience these auspicious signs. The wondrous workings of the Pure Land School are not something that those who have yet to practice this method of cultivation can comprehend.

### **C. We know of the existence of the Pure Land through scientific evidence**

Based on our scientific knowledge, we know that there are other solar systems besides our own, and that there are other galaxies besides our own Milky Way. In other words, there are many other worlds in

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addition to our own world, the planet Earth. The vastness and limitlessness of the universe are far beyond anything our ancestors could have imagined.

We do not really need the findings of modern science to tell us that there are other worlds besides ours. In the Buddhist sutras, there is an interesting story about the existence of other worlds. Once when Sakyamuni Buddha was teaching the Dharma, he told his disciples that his voice could be heard many distant lands away and that the force of his voice could be felt in many worlds. One of the Buddha's disciples, Maudgalyayana, the foremost in supernatural power, was skeptical that the Buddha's voice could reach such far-off places. He decided to investigate for himself and used his supernatural power to go to a Buddha land that was ten billion Buddha lands away. In this Buddha land, Tathagata Lokeshvaraja was teaching the Dharma. At this particular moment, a person in the audience picked something off his body and exclaimed, "Why is a little worm crawling on my body?"

Tathagata Lokeshvaraja said, "This is not a little worm; this is Maudgalyayana, a disciple of Sakyamuni Buddha from the saha world." Maudgalyayana

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was not small, but when compared to the people of this Buddha land, he was no bigger than a little worm. Then Tathagata Lokeshvaraja told Maudgalyayana, “The eminence and virtues of all Buddhas are not something that can be comprehended and equaled by sravakas. You should not test them with your supernatural power.” From then on, Maudgalyayana firmly believed that there are limitless worlds and limitless Buddhas in the vast immenseness of space.

### **III. The Different Types of Pure Lands**

In addition to the Pure Land of Ultimate Bliss, there are many other pure lands. They can be classified into four main categories: the distinctive Pure Lands of the Mahayana School, the Pure Land of the Three Vehicles, the Pure Land of the Five Vehicles, and the Pure Land on Earth.

#### **A. The Distinctive Pure Lands of the Mahayana School**

The distinctive pure lands of the Mahayana, the Great Vehicle School, include the Pure Land of Ultimate Bliss of the Amitabha Buddha and the Pure

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Land of Crystal Radiance of the Medicine Buddha. In fact, Amitabha Buddha's Pure Land of Ultimate Bliss is especially remarkable.

Although there are numerous discussions in Mahayana sutras regarding the many pure lands of the various Buddhas of the ten directions and espousing their many easy-to-travel paths of cultivation, it is the Pure Land of Amitabha Buddha that elicits the most awe and wonder. Of the many Dharma methods discussed in the sutras, the most extraordinary is the Pure Land practice in which one recites and remembers the name of Amitabha Buddha in order to be reborn in the Pure Land of Ultimate Bliss. This Dharma method, a unique feature of Amitabha Buddha's Pure Land, is the result of the strength of the forty-eight great vows, which Amitabha Buddha made while becoming a Buddha. With the merits of his compassionate vows, Amitabha Buddha manifests the Pure Land of Ultimate Bliss. Amitabha Buddha also proclaims categorically that anyone who believes in the great vows of Amitabha Buddha and wishes to be reborn in the Pure Land of Ultimate Bliss should meditate on the name of Amitabha Buddha, be it for one day, two days, or even just ten

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times. If the person is sincere and can meditate on the name of Amitabha Buddha with single-mindedness, the strength of Amitabha Buddha will guide the person to be reborn, by transformation into a lotus flower, in the Land of Ultimate Bliss, even though he or she may still be burdened with karma. There is no regression from the Pure Land into the wheel of rebirth because one continues to practice in order to eventually become free from the wheel of rebirth and attain the ultimate bodhi. The Pure Land of Amitabha Buddha is said to be most remarkable because of the unique features of this Dharma method.

The other pure land is the Medicine Buddha's Eastern Pure Land of Crystal Radiance. While the Pure Land of Amitabha Buddha symbolizes restoration, the Pure Land of the Medicine Buddha symbolizes growth. The sutra says that when the Medicine Buddha was cultivating the path of Buddhahood, he made twelve great vows. He vowed to help us sentient beings grow in wisdom and to be successful in our careers and endeavors; he vowed to help us when we are handicapped, poor, and helpless. He vowed that we would not be lacking in food and other necessities, that we do not fall prey to false teachings,

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that we do not break the law and thus are safe from the pain of punishment, that there is equality between the sexes, and that we will become Buddhas.

With his great vows, Medicine Buddha manifests the Pure Land of Crystal Radiance in the East. Most remarkably, the *Medicine Sutra* points out that those who recite the name of the Medicine Buddha can also be reborn in the Pure Land of Amitabha Buddha in the west if they so desire and practice accordingly.

Some people may say that the heaven of the Christian religion is the same as the Pure Land of Ultimate Bliss in Buddhism. Actually, the two are not the same. Venerable Master Yin-shun, a contemporary master, pointed out two differences between the Buddhist Pure Land and the Christian heaven.

- a. Complete equality with no class differences. In the Pure Land of Ultimate Bliss, there is complete equality, with no class differences. This is not true for the Christian heaven, where only God is God and other heavenly beings will never become God. In the Pure Land, everyone can become Buddha. There is no class distinction.

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b. Continuing practice and not final fulfillment. Christians believe that going to heaven is the final fulfillment or the ultimate state. This contrasts with the Buddhist teachings that one still needs to practice even after being reborn in the Pure Land. In the Pure Land one is reborn by transformation into a lotus flower and must continue to practice until the lotus flower blooms. In other words, the Dharma is learned and practiced until Buddhahood is attained.

### **B. The Pure Land of the Three Vehicles**

The Pure Land of the Three Vehicles—sravaka, pratyeka-buddha, and bodhisattva—is the liberation its practitioners realize as they practice and cultivate according to the following stages: eliminate defilements, realize the truth, and become liberated from birth and death. Although the Pure Land they realize is from the same Dharma and results in the same liberation—just as all rivers entering the sea will acquire the same salty taste of the sea—their state of mind tends to be founded on self-liberation. Though it is true that these sacred practitioners do not create any more new karma and will not go through the

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suffering of birth and death again, they should continue to further their practice toward an even more sublime state of mind. The Pure Land of the Three Vehicles is not the ultimate goal; it is only a stop on their way to the ultimate destination. Thus, the holy practitioners of the Three Vehicles should also recite the name of Amitabha Buddha and aim for the Pure Land of Ultimate Bliss so they can continue on their path to Buddhahood.

### **C. The Pure Land of the Five Vehicles**

The Pure Land of the Five Vehicles—human, celestial being, and the three vehicles mentioned in the last section—is in fact the Tusita Pure Land of Maitreya Bodhisattva, who Sakyamuni Buddha had prophesied would be the future Buddha of our world. The Tusita Pure Land, also known as the Inner Court of Tusita, is a majestic, pure heaven within the Three Realms, where Maitreya Bodhisattva is currently teaching the Dharma. If one is reborn in the Tusita Pure Land, one will be able to see Maitreya Bodhisattva. When Maitreya Bodhisattva becomes the Buddha of our world in the future, one will also follow Maitreya Bodhisattva and be reborn into this

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world. In this way, one has the opportunity to personally listen to the teachings of the Maitreya Buddha.

#### **D. The Pure Land on Earth**

An example of the Pure Land on Earth is the one described in the *Vimalakirti Sutra*. It is said in the sutra that although Vimalakirti lived in the saha world, his state of mind was that of the Pure Land. What does the Pure Land on Earth mean? Before we explore the answer to this question, we must first understand the whereabouts of pure lands.

When we speak of pure lands, be it the Mahayana Pure Land, the heavenly Pure Land, or the earthly Pure Land, we can use the colloquial term “heaven” to speak of them. When people ask where heaven or hell is, they are, in a certain way, also raising the question of the whereabouts of pure lands. In this regard, I would like to make the following three points.

- a. Heaven can be found in heaven, and hell can be found in hell.
- b. Both heaven and hell can be found among us. There are many of us, who because of previous

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merits and good causal conditions enjoy a peaceful and happy life. Is this not life in heaven? Then, there are those who are beset with mental anguish and are afflicted with physical pain. Is this not life in hell?

c. Both heaven and hell are in one's mind. There are people whose minds are filled with grudges, discontentment, mistrust, hatred, greed, and delusion—this is hell. If we can forget about disputes with others, expand our hearts and minds to accept everything, give generously to others, be complimentary of others, or treat others with compassion—this is heaven. As we have not been reborn in the Pure Land of Ultimate Bliss at this moment, the way that we can be close to Amitabha Buddha is to work together to transform our saha world into a pure land on Earth.

If we want to construct a pure land on Earth, we have to start with our minds because “when the mind is pure, the land is also pure.” We have to start with eliminating unwholesome attachments to the five desires (wealth, beauty, fame, food, and sleep) and

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the six dusts (sight, sound, smell, taste, touch, and mental objects).

Once, Sariputra asked the Buddha, “The Buddha lands of the ten directions are all very pure. Why is our saha world so corrupt and filthy?”

The Buddha replied, “You cannot comprehend the world in which I live.” With this, the Buddha pressed the earth with his toe. Immediately, the world became brilliant, pure, and magnificent. The Buddha then continued, “This is the world in which I live.”

From this, we can see that while we may be doing the same task in the same place at the same time, we all react differently. The worlds within our minds are all different.

Among the different types of pure lands in Buddhism, Amitabha Buddha’s Pure Land of Ultimate Bliss with its distinctive Mahayana teachings is especially remarkable. While there is the Pure Land of the Three Vehicles, its practitioners seek liberation only for themselves. Although the “easily accessible” Pure Land of Maitreya Bodhisattva is open to all, it does not provide the opportunity to realize Buddhahood in one lifetime” that is available in Amitabha’s Pure Land. Also, as the Maitreya Pure Land is within

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the Tusita Heaven, it is still within the Three Realms; in contrast, the Amitabha's Pure Land is one in which those who are reborn into it will never regress into the swirl of rebirth.

#### **IV. A Description of the Pure Land of Amitabha Buddha**

A simple description of the Pure Land of Amitabha is that it is pure. Purity means radiance, holiness, peacefulness, and happiness. There are five kinds of purity in the Pure Land of Amitabha: the purity of the environment, the purity of life, the purity of economics, the purity of the people, and the purity of body and mind.

##### **A. The Purity of the Environment**

Among the many social problems we have currently, a serious problem is the pollution of the environment. All forms of pollution exist, threatening our health and endangering human existence. There is no environmental pollution in the Pure Land of Ultimate Bliss. Its ground is covered with gold. In the Pure Land, there are seven rows of railings, seven

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layers of nets, and seven rows of trees everywhere. Ponds are made of seven jewels, and water has eight excellent qualities. Everything is made of gold, silver, or lapis lazuli, and there is no filth and pollution. The construction of the Pure Land of Ultimate Bliss is better than the most modern city; its scenery is more picturesque than any national park.

Some people may be skeptical that such a divine place can possibly exist. Let me use two examples to dispel such skepticism. If someone had suggested several hundred years ago that there would be a kind of oily substance which could be used to pave roads to give them a smooth clean surface, nobody at that time would have believed such a possibility. Today, roads paved with asphalt are very common. A few hundred years ago, it was inconceivable that people living on the top floor of a tall building would be able to have running water just by turning on the faucet. Today, no matter on which floor one lives, one can get running water with a turn of the faucet. This is also true of the remarkable features of the Pure Land of Ultimate Bliss that we alluded to earlier—we need to believe in the existence of the Pure Land. In the Pure Land, palaces beam with grandeur, birds speak

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of Dharma, trees and flowers play music, grounds radiate with beauty, and water flows clean and pure.

Life is healthy and happy for those who are reborn in the Pure Land of Ultimate Bliss. When they wake up in the morning, their eyes feast on the beautiful surroundings, and their hunger is automatically satisfied. When they listen to Amitabha Buddha teaching the Dharma, they are no longer thirsty and tired. After mealtime, they use their robes to carry flowers and fly off to the Buddha lands in ten directions to make offerings to the different Buddhas. They take walks by the water and in the woods. Life in the Pure Land is carefree. People are kind and virtuous—they listen to the Dharma, practice the teachings, and are mindful of the Buddha. In the Pure Land, the environment is beautiful, buildings are magnificent, and streets are paved and tree-lined. Everyone who is reborn here is happy and content. This is why they call this place the World of Ultimate Bliss.

### **B. The Purity of Life**

When one lives in a pure environment, one's life becomes pure as well. Life in the World of Ultimate

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Bliss is different from that of our world. There are no concerns for fame, fortune, and the necessities of everyday living. In the World of Ultimate Bliss, those who need clothing will be clothed; those who need food will be fed. They are at ease and without any worries.

Our lives very much revolve around our need for three meals a day. We spend a lot of time and energy in the kitchen, preparing and cooking our meals. We spend even more time consuming the food and then passing the waste from our bodies. Then the cycle starts again, day after day, month after month, and year after year. How tiresome and exhausting! This is in stark contrast to life in the Pure Land, where everything is satisfying. Every aspect of life, from clothing, shelter, transportation, and entertainment, is pleasing and trouble-free. Life there is pure and refined.

### **C. The Purity of Economics**

People who are reborn in the World of Ultimate Bliss lead a very different life than people in our world—they need not worry about money problems or financial status. They do not need to worry about

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transportation because they can freely fly wherever they want. They do not need to buy any houses because they can live at ease in any circumstances. They do not need to save money because they have the wealth of the Dharma. They do not need to engage in business because they do not lack anything. People reborn in the Pure Land live a life rich in Dharma and they enjoy a life of practicing the Dharma. The Pure Land is free of economic problems of any kind, and those who are reborn there live a life without contention and hidden agendas. People in the Pure Land live in accordance with Truth and hence are perfectly free.

#### **D. The Purity of People**

In our world, conflicts between nations, between people, or even between family members are unavoidable. But in the World of Ultimate Bliss, there are no such problems. It says in the *Amitabha Sutra*, “All meritorious people gather together...” They gather for the pursuit of Truth and for the understanding of the Dharma. They are focused on contemplating the Buddha and the Dharma, and they do not entangle themselves in power struggles, wars

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battles of wits, nor in senseless disputes. Everyone lives together in peace and harmony. Thus, the World of Ultimate Bliss is truly a place that is worthy of our pursuit. We should always be mindful of Amitabha Buddha and recite the Buddha's name so that we are able to be reborn there.

#### **E. The Purity of Body and Mind**

In the World of Ultimate Bliss, the body of one who is reborn there comes by transformation into a lotus flower; therefore it does not have to go through the suffering of birth, aging, sickness, and death. The mind is also pure; there are no contaminating thoughts of greed, hatred, and ignorance. Both the external body and the internal mind are in accordance with Truth. There is no worry, suffering, or dispute. Life is pure and carefree, which is why this world is called the World of Ultimate Bliss.

What has been said about the Pure Land of Ultimate Bliss represents only a glimpse of it. The Pure Land is not something that can be described in a few simple sentences. What has been covered here is only a small fraction of what is said in the *Amitabha Sutra*.

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## **V. Why do we need the Pure Land in this day and age?**

Living in today's times, when the political arena of the world is volatile, social order is fragile, and individuals are distressed, there are more reasons than ever why we need the Western Pure Land of Ultimate Bliss. Why do we need to be mindful of Amitabha Buddha and recite his name? Why do we need to practice the Dharma method of the Pure Land School? The reasons are:

- Darkness needs light.
- Suffering needs solace.
- War needs peace.
- Volatility needs stability.
- Poverty needs wealth.
- Brevity needs eternity.
- Affliction needs relief.
- Rebirth needs liberation.

### **A. Darkness needs light**

Darkness exists everywhere; it pervades society as well as the minds of the people. Someone feeling the way through life in darkness needs and yearns for

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light. Where can it be found? Light can be found in the Pure Land of Ultimate Bliss; there is no darkness in the Pure Land. Amitabha Buddha is also called the Buddha of Infinite Light. Because we need light we need the Pure Land.

### **B. Suffering needs solace**

Living and working in our world, we are bound to face disappointment and hardship sooner or later. To whom can we turn for solace during these difficult times? There is a saying that captures the loneliness of one in despair, which is: “The rich may reside in remote places, but they still have visitors from afar. The poor may live in the midst of the city, yet there is no one asking about them.” Amitabha Buddha is always close by when we are in trouble. Even when the whole world has turned away from us, Amitabha Buddha will not desert us as long as we recite his name. That is why it is very important to recite the name of Amitabha Buddha.

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### **C. War needs peace**

As wars and conflicts erupt in different parts of the world, lives are disrupted and anguish is everywhere. People need and wish for peace. The Pure Land of Ultimate Bliss is where we can find eternal peace. In the meantime, we can build a pure land on Earth with our kindness and compassion. When we all practice patience and tolerance under the compassionate guiding light of Amitabha Buddha, our world will have eternal peace.

### **D. Volatility needs stability**

If we were to frequently move from place to place, we would most certainly feel unsettled and agitated. When we have a chance to settle down in a stable and reliable environment, we will no doubt feel secure and at ease. Only the World of Ultimate Bliss can offer us true security. Our saha world is chaotic and volatile. In a span of a few decades, our world has witnessed both World War I and World War II, and we are not far from the possibility of World War III. The Buddha described our predicament most accurately when he said, “The three realms are like burning houses; there is no safety in the Three

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Realms.” It was not that long ago in the seventies when an energy shortage disrupted global transportation and sent the world economy into a tailspin. During these volatile times, we most urgently need the Pure Land of Ultimate Bliss.

#### **E. Poverty needs wealth**

When we are well provided for, we do not have to worry about our means of livelihood from one day to the next. Buddhism does not reject or disapprove of material prosperity. In fact, material prosperity in the Pure Land far exceeds that of our world. Even the ground is carpeted with gold. There are many places in our saha world that are afflicted with poverty, which can in turn cause a host of other problems. Everyone wishes for a comfortable living; in the Pure Land of Ultimate Bliss, everyone is well provided for and lives comfortably. We can, indeed, say that the Land of Ultimate Bliss is the most prosperous place, where there is no poverty.

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### **F. Brevity needs eternity**

Life is too short. Even if one could live to the incredible age of one hundred years, time still passes by like a flash of lightning. The life of Amitabha Buddha is limitless and transcends time. If we can attain eternity from brevity, is life not beautiful? The Pure Land of Ultimate Bliss is an eternal world.

### **G. Affliction needs relief**

There are many afflictions in life. There are the afflictions of greed, hatred, delusion, and envy. Passion, animosity, and endearment are also forms of afflictions. Then, there are afflictions such as hunger, excessive warmth, extreme coldness, and thirst. Of course, disappointments and sorrows are afflictions. These afflictions are like iron chains that bind each and every one of us. We all want to be free from these shackles. The way to achieve this is to be reborn in the Pure Land of Ultimate Bliss.

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## **H. Rebirth needs deliverance**

Birth and death, death and birth—we course through the six realms of existence without any respite. We all have to face the wheel of rebirth. The unending cycles of birth and death can be compared to an ocean and abyss that traps us in its depths. Sometimes we yearn for a longer life, and at other times we fear death. Our yearning for a longer life cannot prolong our life for even one second. Our fear of death cannot protect us from death. Thus, we should strive for the state of no birth. Only in the Pure Land of Ultimate Bliss are we truly liberated from the wheel of rebirth.

We have seen that because of our need for light, solace, peace, stability, wealth, eternity, relief, and deliverance, we should strive to be reborn in the Pure Land. How can we be reborn in the Pure Land? There are many kinds of practices leading to the Pure Land, and the easiest one is the recitation of the name of Amitabha Buddha. If we have the three criteria of faith, will, and practice, together with the necessary merits, virtues, and causal conditions, and if we can recite the name of Amitabha Buddha with single-mindedness, then we will surely be reborn in the

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Pure Land. How can we ensure that we have all the necessary causes and conditions mentioned above? Let me conclude by offering you the essential practices described in the *Amitayus Sutra*:

- a. Be filial to your parents, be respectful of your teachers and elders, be compassionate and abstain from killing, and be willing to practice benevolence.
- b. Follow the Three Refuges (refuge in the Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha), uphold the precepts, do not violate the proper rules of conduct, and maintain mental and physical purity.
- c. Develop your bodhicitta, believe in the Law of Cause and Effect, recite and understand the Mahayana teachings, and encourage others to practice the same.

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## **Venerable Master Hsing Yun**

Founder of the Fo Guang Shan (Buddha's Light Mountain) Buddhist Order and the Buddha's Light International Association, Venerable Master Hsing Yun has dedicated his life to teaching Humanistic Buddhism, which seeks to realize spiritual cultivation in everyday living.

Master Hsing Yun is the 48<sup>th</sup> Patriarch of the Linji Chan School. Born in Jiangsu Province, China in 1927, he was tonsured under Venerable Master Zhikai at the age of twelve and became a novice monk at Qixia Vinaya College. He was fully ordained in 1941 following years of strict monastic training. When he left Jiaoshan Buddhist College at the age of twenty, he had studied for almost ten years in a monastery.

Due to the civil war in China, Master Hsing Yun moved to Taiwan in 1949 where he undertook the revitalization of Chinese Mahayana Buddhism. He began fulfilling his vow to promote the Dharma by starting chanting groups, student and youth groups, and other civic-minded organizations with Leiyin Temple in Ilan as his base. Since the founding of Fo

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Guang Shan monastery in Kaohsiung in 1967, more than two hundred temples have been established worldwide. Hsi Lai Temple, the symbolic torch of the Dharma spreading to the West, was built in 1988 near Los Angeles.

Master Hsing Yun has been guiding Buddhism on a course of modernization by integrating Buddhist values into education, cultural activities, charity, and religious practices. To achieve these ends, he travels all over the world, giving lectures and actively engaging in religious dialogue. The Fo Guang Shan organization also oversees sixteen Buddhist colleges and four universities, one of which is the University of the West in Rosemead, California.

Over the past fifty years, Master Hsing Yun has written many books teaching Humanistic Buddhism and defining its practice. Whether providing insight into Buddhist sutras, human nature, or inter-religious exchange, he stresses the need for respect, compassion, and tolerance among all beings in order to alleviate suffering in this world. His works have been translated into English, French, German, Indonesian, Japanese, Korean, Portuguese, Russian, Sinhalese, Spanish, Swedish, Thai, and Vietnamese.

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## **Buddha's Light Publishing F.G.S. Int'l Translation Center**

For as long as Venerable Master Hsing Yun has been a Buddhist monk, he has had a firm belief that books and other means of transmitting the Buddha's teachings can unite us spiritually, help us practice Buddhism at a higher altitude, and continuously challenge our views on how we define and live our lives.

In 1996, the Fo Guang Shan International Translation Center was established with this goal in mind. This marked the beginning of a series of publications translated into various languages from the Master's original writings in Chinese. Presently, several translation centers have been set up worldwide. Centers that coordinate translation or publication projects are located in Los Angeles, USA; Montreal, Canada; Sydney, Australia; Berlin, Germany; France; Sweden; Argentina; Brazil; South Africa; Japan; Korea; and Thailand.

In 2001, Buddha's Light Publishing was estab-

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