

LISTEN TO YOURSELF

THINK EVERYTHING OVER

Dharma Talks by
VENERABLE MASTER HSUAN HUA

AMITABHA RECITATION

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The Eight Guidelines of the Buddhist Text Translation Society

1. A volunteer must free him/herself from the motives of personal fame and profit.
2. A volunteer must cultivate a respectful and sincere attitude free from arrogance and conceit.
3. A volunteer must refrain from aggrandizing his/her work and denigrating that of others.
4. A volunteer must not establish him/herself as the standard of correctness and suppress the work of others with his or her fault-finding.
5. A volunteer must take the Buddha-mind as his/her own mind.
6. A volunteer must use the wisdom of Dharma-selecting Vision to determine true principles.
7. A volunteer must request Virtuous Elders in the ten directions to certify his/her translations.
8. A volunteer must endeavour to propagate the teachings by printing Sutras, Shastra texts, and Vinaya texts when the translations are certified as being correct.

Introduction

*The sweet dew from the Bodhisattva's
 1 willow branch
 Can cause one drop to pervade the
 1 ten directions.
 All filth and dirt are completely wiped away...*

With these words, in June of 1970, the Guan Yin recitation session was opened. It was the first such session ever held in the western world, and those attending, inspired by the Venerable Master Hua's daily instructional talks, worked to their utmost reciting the name of the Bodhisattva.

In 1962 the Venerable Master Hua brought the banner of the Orthodox Dharma to the West. In 1968 a group of young Americans asked him to speak the *Shurangama Sutra*. The Master consented and the Sutra Study and Practice Session lasted for ninety-six days. From that time onwards, the Master has continued to lecture daily on the Dharma, expounding such Sutras as: *The Lotus Sutra*, *The Sixth Patriarch's Sutra*, *The Earth Store Sutra*, *The Vajra Sutra*, *The Heart Sutra*, and many others. Currently, at the newly established City of Ten Thousand Buddhas, the Master continues to explain the King of Sutras, The Great Avatamsaka Sutra.

In our age of moral and spiritual decay, many bemoan the advent of the "Dharma-ending Age". But the Venerable Master has made a vow that he *will not allow the Dharma-ending Age to descend*. Because he has taken the maintaining of the Orthodox Dharma as his personal responsibility, from the very beginning he has taught his students the fundamental importance of practicing what they learn. During the 1968 Study and Practice Session he spoke to his freedom-loving American disciples, telling them, "It is absolutely essential for people who want to cultivate the Way to

receive the precepts...From the lectures we derive understanding, and we practice by investigating Chan. Through the combination of practice and understanding we can stride forward...An example will help to illustrate the value of combining understanding with practice. A blind man and a cripple lived together in a house. One day it caught on fire. The blind man couldn't see and had no way to get out. The cripple could see, but he didn't have any legs. What a predicament! Then a wise advisor told them, 'You two can get out of this burning house. How? Cripple, let the blind man use your eyes. Blind man, let the cripple use your legs.' They followed his advice and made the best of their situation. The cripple climbed on the blind man's back and told the blind man where to walk. Thanks to the timely advice, they managed to save themselves."

From the Sutras and the teachings of the Buddha we gain understanding. From holding the precepts and through meditation we put that understanding into practice. As his students tackle the often elusive principles of the Doctrine the Master encourages them. "Do not be afraid of not understanding," he will say. "Just be afraid that you will not practice what you know. If you do not practice, you are useless..."

As long as there are those who practice the teachings, the Orthodox Dharma remains. In the final analysis, there is no Orthodox or Dharma-ending Age. Those who practice the Orthodox Dharma live in the Orthodox Dharma Age. Those who practice deviant dharmas live in the Dharma-ending age. Those who follow the Buddha's precepts, study the teachings, and practice them, are certain to gain wisdom and eventually reach enlightenment, even now, in our "corrupt" age. On the other hand, those who do not follow the Buddha's instructions could not be saved, even if they were face to face with Shakyamuni Buddha himself!

The present volume contains the Master's lively and practical instructions given to a group of hard working cultivators of both

recitation and Chan. As you find this volume in your hands, you can be assured of your affinities with the Dharma. In 1968 the Master said, “We have karmic connections with Shakyamuni Buddha and the Dharma which he proclaimed and which remains in the world. So now we have the opportunity to understand the doctrines. We are now in an advantageous position, even though we have been born after Shakyamuni Buddha spoke the Dharma.”

The Master has brought the Orthodox Dharma to the West. We now can hear, study and practice it. The house of the Triple World is on fire. Crippled and blinded as we may be by our degenerate age, we have been shown a way out. The world needs the light of Dharma and there is really no time to stand on the sidelines “bemoaning the descent of the Dharma-ending Age”. It is time we got down to the work at hand.

Bhikshuni Heng-yin

Buddhist Text Translation Society

July 1978

The Venerable Master Hsuan Hua

a brief portrait

Dhyana Master Hsuan Hua (Dharma name An Tz'u, also known as Tu Lun) was born on the sixteenth day of the third month, 1908, in Shuang Ch'eng County, Northeast China. His father, Pai Fuhai, and mother, Hu, had eight children, of which the Master was the youngest. His mother often recited the name of Amita Buddha and in a dream one night shortly before the Master was born, she saw Amita Buddha emitting light from between his eyebrows that illumined the entire world system of one billion worlds. When she awoke, her room was filled with a rare fragrance.

His home was located in the countryside where there were few neighbors and not until he was eleven years old did he discover the phenomenon of death. While walking with some friends through a pasture, they came upon the body of a dead baby girl. The Master did not understand why this baby lay so still upon the ground and inquired of his friends, who replied, "She's dead." Puzzled, he returned to his home and asked his mother what exactly was this thing called death. She replied, "All people, whether rich or poor, must die, either from old age, sickness, or through an accident." The Master further asked, "How does one free oneself from death?" At that time there was a visitor at his home, one who cultivated the Way, and he answered the Master's question, "It is only through cultivation of the Way, awakening to one's own mind and seeing one's fundamental nature, that one can be liberated from birth and death in the continuous cycle of the six paths."

On hearing this the Master wished to immediately leave the home-life and begin to cultivate, but his mother told him that he

must wait, for she needed him to care for her in her old age.

When he was nineteen years old, his mother died. He left the home-life, bowing to the Venerable Master Ch'ang Chih as his teacher, and received the ten precepts of a sramanera, after which he took up the practice of sitting by his mother's grave, observing a mourning-period of three years. He lived in an A-frame hut made of sorghum stalks, cultivating dhyana samadhi and recitation of the name of Amita Buddha, eating one meal a day, and always sitting, never lying down. Occasionally he would enter samadhi for weeks at a time, never rising from his seat.

One night the residents of the nearby village saw that the Master's hut was on fire. A brilliant light shot up ten yards into the air, and the area around the hut was as bright as broad daylight. Many people rushed to the graveyard, crying, "The filial son's hut has caught fire!" and soon there were hundreds of people there to lend assistance with buckets of water. When they arrived, however, they found the hut unburned; the Master was sitting absorbed in meditation.

On one occasion, the Sixth Patriarch, Great Master Hui Neng of the T'ang Dynasty, came to the Master's hut and told him that in the future he would go to the West where he would meet many people with whom he had affinities and thereby establish the Dharma, causing it to flourish. After the Second World War, the Master traveled three thousand miles to Nan Hua Monastery in Canton Province to pay his respects to the Venerable Hsu Yun, who was then one hundred and nine years old. During his journey he resided at P'u T'ou Mountain, the Bodhimanda of the Bodhisattva Avalokiteshvara, where he received the complete Bhikshu Precepts. When he arrived at Nan Hua, the two masters greeted one another; the Venerable Master Hsu Yun recognized the Master's attainment and transmitted the wonderful mind-seal to him, making him the Ninth Patriarch of the Wei Yang Lineage,

and asked him to serve as the Director of the Nan Hua Institute for the Study of the Vinaya.

In 1950 he resigned his post at Nan Hua Monastery and journeyed to Hong Kong, where he lived in a mountainside cave, until the large influx of Sangha members fleeing the mainland required his help in establishing new monasteries and temples throughout Hong Kong. He personally established two temples and a lecture hall and helped to bring about the construction of many others. He dwelt in Hong Kong for twelve years, during which many people were influenced by his arduous cultivation and awesome manner to take refuge with the Triple Jewel and support the propagation of the good Dharma.

In 1962 he carried the Buddha's Dharma banner farther westward, to the shores of America, where he took up residence in San Francisco and patiently waited for past causes to ripen and bear fruit. In the beginning of the year 1968, the Master declared that the flower of Buddhism would bloom that year in America with five petals; in the summer of that year the Master conducted the Shurangama Sutra Dharma Assembly which lasted for 96 days--five of the people who attended that session left the home-life and became bhikshus and bhikshunis under the Master's tutelage. Since that time the Master has conducted many Dharma assemblies and delivered lectures on the Heart Sutra, the Diamond Sutra, the Sixth Patriarch's Sutra, the Amitabha Sutra, the Sutra of the Past Vows of Earth Store Bodhisattva, the Great Compassion Heart Dharani Sutra, and the Dharma Blossom Sutra. The Master then lectured the Avatamsaka Preface, Prologue, and the entire Sutra over a period of nine years. With such tireless vigor, the Master has firmly planted the roots of Dharma in Western soil so that it can become self-perpetuating. He has spent hours every day explaining the teachings and their application in cultivation, steeping his disciples in the nectar of Dharma that they might

carry on the Buddha's teaching.

The miraculous events that have taken place in the Master's life are far too numerous to relate. He has freed many from the burdens of disease and other afflictions, and his followers number in the tens of thousands. His steadfast cultivation of bitter practices, the moral prohibitions, and the six paramitas, paired with his unwavering samadhi and profound knowledge of the teachings serve as a model for gods and men throughout the Dharma Realm.

At the age of nineteen, on the anniversary of the enlightenment of the Bodhisattva Avalokiteshvara, the Master made eighteen vows before the Buddha, saying, "Bowing in obeisance to the Buddhas of the ten directions, the three divisions of the Dharma, and the venerable sages of past and present, I call upon them to bear witness as I, disciple Tu Lun, Shih An Tz'u, resolve to not seek blessings among gods and men, the vehicles of sound-hearers, those enlightened to conditions, and so forth, up to and including all of the Bodhisattvas of the provisional teaching, but only for the sake of the most supreme vehicle resolve my mind on Bodhi, in the wish that I and all living beings of the Dharma Realm simultaneously obtain the utmost, equal, and right enlightenment.

- 1) I vow that as long as there is a single Bodhisattva in the three periods of time throughout the ten directions of the Dharma Realm, to the very end of empty space, who has not accomplished Buddhahood, I too will not attain the right enlightenment.
- 2) I vow that as long as there is a single Pratyeka Buddha in the three periods of time throughout the ten directions of the Dharma Realm, to the very end of empty space, who has not attained Buddhahood, I too will not attain the right enlightenment.

- 3) I vow that as long as there is a single Shravaka in the three periods of time throughout the ten directions of the Dharma Realm, to the very end of empty space, who has not attained Buddhahood, I too will not attain the right enlightenment.
- 4) I vow that as long as there is a single god who has not accomplished Buddhahood, I too will not attain the right enlightenment.
- 5) I vow that as long as there is a single human who has not accomplished Buddhahood, I too will not attain the right enlightenment.
- 6) I vow that as long as there is a single asura who has not accomplished Buddhahood, I too will not attain the right enlightenment.
- 7) I vow that as long as there is a single animal who has not accomplished Buddhahood, I too will not attain the right enlightenment.
- 8) I vow that as long as there is a single hungry ghost who has not accomplished Buddhahood, I too will not attain the right enlightenment.
- 9) I vow that as long as there is a single hell-dweller who has not accomplished Buddhahood, I too will not attain the right enlightenment.
- 10) I vow that as long as there is a single god, immortal, man, asura, air-bound or water-bound creature, animate or inanimate object, or a single dragon, beast, ghost, or spirit, etc., of the spiritual realm that has taken refuge with me and has not accomplished Buddhahood, I too will not attain the right enlightenment.
- 11) I vow to fully dedicate all blessings and bliss which I ought to receive and enjoy myself to all living beings of the Dharma Realm.

- 12) I vow to fully take upon myself all sufferings and hardships of all the living beings in the Dharma Realm.
- 13) I vow to manifest innumerable bodies as a means to gain access into the minds of living beings throughout the universe who do not believe in the Buddhadharma, causing them to correct their faults and tend toward wholesomeness, repent of their errors and start anew, taking refuge in the Triple Jewel and ultimately accomplishing Buddhahood.
- 14) I vow that all living beings who see my face or ever hear my voice will fix their thoughts on Bodhi and quickly accomplish the Buddha-Way.
- 15) I vow to respectfully observe the Buddha's instructions and cultivate the practice of eating only one meal a day.
- 16) I vow to enlighten all sentient beings, universally responding to the multitude of differing potentials.
- 17) I vow to obtain the five eyes, six spiritual penetrations, and the freedom of being able to fly in this very life.
- 18) I vow that all of my vows will certainly be fulfilled."

Instructions To Participants In The Buddha Recitation Session

The Dharma-door of Reciting the Buddha's name works very directly. You need only to concentrate your mind, and naturally you will attain the Buddha Recitation Samadhi. There is no need to further investigate its meaning, or pile a head on top of a head, looking for business when there's nothing to do. Reciting to the point of single-mindedness, when the water flows and the wind blows, all are proclaiming the wonderful Dharma of the Mahayana. Of the mountains, rivers and great earth, none are not our self-nature of True Suchness. The Buddha and I have become one; the Buddha and I were originally not two. When the point is reached of not reciting and yet reciting, reciting and yet not reciting, then inside there is no body or mind and outside there is no world. Empty space is smashed to pieces, the tracks of false thoughts have vanished. In lucid stillness, the pure original source appears. Then one attains great ease and comfort, great liberation, and great calm. One can certify to limitless life and fulfill one's vows of Bodhi. A verse says,

*Concentrate on reciting the Buddha's name,
in the country of calm dwelling;
With Amitabha's great vows one goes to the West.
The three levels and nine grades of
lotuses manifest;
The six paramitas and the myriad
conducts are perfected in a kshana.*

*Guan Yin and Great Strength Bodhisattvas
are our companions.
With Manjushri and Universal Worthy,
we sail on the same Dharma boat.
Our compassionate father brings us back
to our old village:
Originally, the world of Ultimate Bliss
was our homeland.*

Talks From

Amitabha Recitation Session

December 31, 1979

People of the Saha World all like happiness and dislike suffering; hell beings like suffering and dislike being happy; hungry ghosts like hatred and dislike compassion; animals like stupidity and dislike wisdom, which is why they are reborn in the path of the animals.

Although we people claim to like being happy and to dislike suffering, we do not know how to get rid of suffering. Heavenly beings also like happiness and dislike suffering.

In the state of the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas there is no suffering and no happiness. Both suffering and bliss are forgotten. Living beings are upside down: they take what is right as wrong and what is wrong as right; they mistake black for white and white for black. Do they know that they are upside down? Yes, they do, but although they know it, they still go right ahead and do wrong. Although they know what is illegal, they deliberately set out to do it. And although they know what is right, they won't do it.

Take for instance taking tea breaks during the Buddha Recitation Session. Now there are special times to drink tea; you just don't drink tea any time you feel like it. People grow tired after reciting for a while, so they go and drink some tea to take a little rest and be lazy. If you are sincerely reciting the Buddha's name, how can you possibly think of drinking tea? You would have long forgotten about tea, not to mention milk. You would have forgotten everything--even about whether you've eaten or not, so how much more would you have forgotten about drinking

tea?

Someone says, “Reciting the Buddha’s name is too dangerous; you may even forget whether you’ve eaten or not!” But that’s right where the *kung fu* (skill) lies! People who really use effort won’t know whether they’ve eaten, whether they’ve been clothed, or whether they’ve slept. They will have forgotten everything. Above, they are not aware of heaven; below, they are not aware of the earth; and, in between they are not aware of people. Everything has become empty. If everything has become empty, how can you possibly think of taking a tea break or drinking milk?!

Some of my disciples dare not drink milk. If they do, their desire thoughts escalate to the point that they cannot control them. Therefore, they go off milk. We eat only in order to support our lives. We take food as medicine. If we do not eat, we will perish, that’s why we must eat a bit of food. We sustain our bodies and keep them from wasting away so that we can use them to cultivate with. You need not concern yourselves with any special kind of nutrition or diet. Once you ingest more nutritious food than you need, you’re in trouble--your thoughts of sexual desire will not stop. How can those who truly use effort find time to drink tea or milk? They don’t even find time to eat, to sleep, or to put on clothes. In every moment they are concentrating on the Buddha’s name, “Namo Amitabha”, without stopping. You recite when you’re asleep, you recite when you are awake, to the point that this phrase of the six magical syllables, “Namo Amitabha”, becomes indestructible. Stretch it out, you can’t snap it; chop at it, you can’t cut through it; even if you use a sword or knife, you still won’t be able to break it. Its strength is more solid than that of diamonds. There is no way you can destroy this “Namo Amitabha”. That is what’s called the Buddha Recitation Samadhi.

You should recite the Buddha’s name in this way, and you

should recite the Sutras in the same way; you should hold mantras in this way, too. In doing so, there is no way you will be able to strike up any false thoughts. Cultivation is not easy. Take a look at Kuo Chen (D.M. Heng Sure of Three Steps One Bow): why has he vowed to not drink milk? Because he knows that milk is something fierce. Once you drink milk, that streak of bull-like nature in you manifests. That bull-like nature which arises is fiercer than a tiger!

Whenever you encounter food that is particularly nutritious, if your body does not need it, if your body is not weak, then you shouldn't take it. Once you take it, you'll have a lot of trouble. So it says, "Too much is equal to not enough"; "having too much of something is as bad as not having enough". It is not the Middle Way.

Every word, act, and deed on the part of living beings is not outside of greed, anger and stupidity. They use greed, anger, and stupidity to cultivate worldly dharmas, and they use greed, anger and stupidity to cultivate transcendental Dharmas as well. So when cultivating they are greedy for enlightenment. They sit in Chan meditation for two-and-a-half-days, and they want to become enlightened; they cultivate a Dharma for two-and-a-half days, and they want to attain spiritual penetrations; they recite the Buddha's name for two-and-a-half days and they want to obtain the Buddha Recitation Samadhi! Take a look at that gigantic greedy mind. It is no less than the manifestation of the greedy ghosts.

You should consider cultivation your duty; it's something that you should do. There is no need for you to be greedy; you need only cultivate. And after a while, when your merit and virtue is perfected, you will naturally accomplish Bodhi. There is no need to be greedy. Originally, you were meant to have success, but if you're too greedy, then you won't be able to chew well or

digest well. For instance, when you're eating food, you have to eat mouthful by mouthful; you can't stuff an entire bowl of rice into your mouth at once, to the point that there is no space at all left inside your mouth! Then how will you be able to chew or swallow? Eating is the simplest analogy for this situation. If you are too greedy, you won't be able to chew your food, much less swallow or digest it.

In cultivating, you should act like nothing is going on. Do not be greedy; don't be obsessed with the things you wish for--you want to become enlightened, you want to attain psychic powers, and on and on. How can things happen so fast? When you plant seeds, they must germinate, and then grow slowly; and even if they sprout and grow, you cannot help the sprouts grow by yanking them out of the earth. When the time comes, naturally they will mature, and your work will be accomplished. The ancients have a saying,

*When grinding an iron pillar
into a fine sewing needle,
In due time it will be completed.*

You can do it, but you shouldn't be afraid of the time it will take. In cultivation, you need to get rid of your faults. What faults? If you like to drink tea, that is your fault; if you like to drink milk, that is your fault; if you like to false think, that is your fault. If you are greedy for comfort and leisure, then there will be no response from your efforts. In applying effort, you cannot be afraid of suffering, afraid of difficulty, or afraid of getting tired. Then you may have some success.

If you keep on drinking tea and drinking milk, you stuff that stinking skin-bag of yours full, so that it becomes big, fat and robust. What use is there in that? No matter how fat you get,

people won't eat human flesh--you can't sell it--so why do you want to be so plump?

Now I have to apologize to the people here. Why? Because I like to joke. All of the fat people here upon hearing what I just said, shouldn't immediately go on a crash diet. If you do so, then it is just piling a head on top of a head and looking for more trouble.

Amitabha Talks

January 3, 1980

The entire world is filled with natural disasters and calamities; it is covered in blackness and there is no light. This is a sign that the human race is in danger of extinction. The noxious vapors that come from killing are something we've never experienced before to such an extent. We are familiar with the atom bomb, the nitrogen bomb, all nuclear weaponry, and now there is the laser, as well. If any of those weapons are used on a grand scale, the entire human race will be wiped out. So the only thing we can do now, is to cultivate according to the Buddha's teaching and invisibly dispel these calamities and disasters.

The world is filled with black energy; black karma envelops us. In any place where there are true cultivators, the disasters in that place will be lessened. If many people come together to cultivate, their collective strength can dispel these disasters and counteract the plunders, and invisibly eradicate this noxious, evil energy and transform it into harmonious and auspicious energy. But first, both feet must be firmly planted on the ground, and then you must realistically cultivate according to the Buddha's teaching.

Everyone should bring forth his or her true heart in reciting the Buddha's name. For every time you recite the Buddha's name, a ray of light shines through empty space. If you recite very sincerely, then this light fills up the trichiliochism, so that the energy of the three-thousand-great-thousand worlds will be auspicious and harmonious and the atmosphere of violence, defilement and disaster will be dispelled and transformed.

The City of Ten Thousand Buddhas is the brightest place on earth, because the ten thousand Buddhas all emit light that

pervades the world. Here at the City of Ten Thousand Buddhas, even if you strike up false thoughts, it has more merit and virtue than doing the most meritorious things in the world outside. Why is this? Because all those who live at the City of Ten Thousand Buddhas are tending towards the Way of goodness. Even if they have false thinking at times, those false thoughts are all good false thoughts; very rarely are they evil false thoughts. That is why you can say that the City of Ten Thousand Buddhas is the sun of the world and the moon of the world--it causes all living beings to become cool and refreshed.

People who live here at the City of Ten Thousand Buddhas have all planted many good roots and made vows in the past. They wish to change the world for the better, to dispel and eradicate disasters and difficulties. Therefore, those of you who live at the City of Ten Thousand Buddhas must go towards the proper in every thought, word and deed; do not flow with the dirt, do not be cheap and common. The people who live here at the City are all good-hearted; evil-natured living beings cannot stay here for long. Sooner or later they will bring about their own expulsion.

The City of Ten Thousand Buddhas has welled up from the earth; eventually it will become the center of World Buddhism, where Buddhists from every country can come and cultivate together to investigate the Buddhadharma and to glorify the Buddha's teaching. Since you are able to leave the home-life here at the City of Ten Thousand Buddhas, it's certain that in the future you can become Buddhas. Why? There is a saying,

*Pavilions that are closest to the water
Catch the reflection of the moonlight first.*

Since you have come here early, you will obtain a lot of merit; those who come later...well, they will have to wait a bit longer.

When some people come to the City of Ten Thousand Buddhas, they find it very difficult to stay put. They feel there is not much going on at the City, that we are pretty uptight and that there isn't much entertainment. But you should know, if you seek outside for entertainment, you will forfeit the genuine bliss within. In this world, if you want the false, then you will lose the real; if you want the real, you have to first put down the false. You cannot on the one hand wish to cultivate a transcendental Dharma, and on the other hand be unwilling to let go of worldly dharmas; with your feet straddling two boats--one foot wants to go north while the other wants to go south--it isn't possible.

Right now we are having a Buddha Recitation Session. You should enter deeply through one door. Use your sincere mind, your true mind, your devout mind to cultivate this Dharma-door; don't waste a moment. You should know that "every inch of time is an inch of life". If you do not apply effort, you increase your offenses; if you use effort, you can increase your good roots. You should honestly recite the Buddha's name; then you will not have wasted your time and your life will not have been worthless.

Pure Land Dharma Talks

At the two-week recitation session, during which participants meditated on and recited Amita Buddha's name from four in the morning until ten in the evening, the Venerable Master gave the following daily instructional talks.

Day #1: December 8, 1972

*The Buddha Amita is the great Dharma King.
May this Bodhisattva guide you to the Western Land.
Morning and night, hold his name,
with sincerity recite it;
At all times, in contemplation, think upon it well.*

*With one heart unconfused, you'll realize samadhi;
When all creation's void,
you'll enter the Lotus Land.
Suddenly awakened to the uncreated,
the Buddha appears in person,
And wonderful enlightenment is naturally attained.*

This eight-line verse praises the Buddha Amita, the great Dharma King. "Amita" translated from Sanskrit means "limitless light" and describes his unlimited wisdom. He is also named "Amitayus", which means "limitless life", symbolizing his unlimited blessings. Because he is complete with both blessings and wisdom, he is called the Buddha of Limitless Life and Light.

The Buddha has perfected great kindness, compassion, joy and renunciation. Having attained blessings and wisdom,

his unselfish wish is to lead all living beings to attain them. He has vowed that all living beings who recite his name will realize Buddhahood. The two words “Amita Buddha” are inconceivable, and within the Buddhadharma, Amita Buddha is a “great Dharma King”.

Those who recite the Buddha’s name have good roots. All you need to do is recite, and without spending money or effort, you too can attain limitless life and light.

“But isn’t this a bit too much of a bargain?” someone may ask.

The reason this simple method is so efficacious is that in former lives, when Amita Buddha was cultivating the Way, he practiced many methods and underwent thousand of tens of thousands of bitter experiences and found them difficult to bring to accomplishment. Accordingly, he made forty-eight great vows, one of which states that any person who recites his name will be assured of rebirth in the Western Land and the attainment of orthodox enlightenment. Until this vow is fulfilled, Amita Buddha himself will not realize Buddhahood.

Our recitation is like sending a telegram to Amitabha in the West. At the end of our lives, the Bodhisattvas will guide us to rebirth in the Western Pure Land.

Morning and night, in motion and stillness, at all times you can recite. While moving you can recite and change the motion into stillness; when still you can recite and turn the stillness into motion. When there is neither motion nor stillness, your telegram to Amitabha has gotten through and you’ve received his response.

If you maintain your recitation with undivided attention morning and night without stopping, you may recite to the point that you don’t know that you are walking when you walk, you don’t feel thirsty when you are thirsty, and you don’t experience

hunger when you are hungry, you don't know you are cold in freezing weather, and you don't feel the warmth when you are warm. People and dharmas are empty, and you and Amita Buddha become one. "Amita Buddha is I and I am Amita Buddha." The two cannot be separated. Recite single-mindedly and sincerely without false thoughts. Pay no attention to worldly concerns. When you don't know the time and don't know the day, you may arrive at a miraculous state.

You may ask, "But isn't that just being stupid?"

In fact, rather than having become stupid, you will have experienced "great wisdom which appears to be stupidity". Confucius said, "I have spoken with Hui for a whole day and he has not contradicted me, as if he were stupid. But I have examined his actions when he retires from me and found that he puts the teachings into practice. Hui is *not* stupid." (*Confucian Analects, II., Chapter 9.*)

I remember when I was young and first started school I was very dull. I studied over and over again but could not remember my lessons, and if I did manage to learn them, I forgot them when I stood before the teacher to recite. Then suddenly my intelligence opened and I was able to recite a work having read it only once, and could master in an hour what took other students five days to learn. I became arrogant and my teacher said to me, "Who would have thought that such a stupid person could become as intelligent as Yen Hui?"

When I heard this, I shivered in fright: "Will I die as young as Yen Hui did?" (Yen Hui, Confucius's most intelligent disciple, died when he was only thirty-three.) So I quit being arrogant and resolved never to be jealous of another person. I took this as my guiding principle and wished that everyone would surpass me. The better others are than I, the more I like it. At that time I also gave myself the name "Semblance of Stupidity".

At all times contemplate the bright countenance of Amita Buddha with single-minded concentration. At all times recollect his wonderful realm and don't think about the matters of the world. With one heart unconfused you may enter dhyana samadhi; all worries and afflictions will completely disappear as you enter the lotus land and enlighten to the unconditioned. This is to understand your own original face. Wonderful enlightenment is just certification to Buddhahood. It's not enough just to say, "I want to be a Buddha," and thereby become a Buddha; on the contrary, you must work with great effort to realize Buddhahood.

If you can recite with one unconfused heart, you may arrive at the state where the ten thousand dharmas are empty. You may then let go of everything and obtain independence and purity. So the Dharma-door of Buddha recitation is ineffably wonderful.

When you have recited enough to have gained some skill, not only will you not feel thirsty, but you will feel as if you were drinking sweet dew. Don't become attached, however, for if you do, your greedy thoughts for sweet dew will cause the fine state to vanish. You may also recite until you see light, the Buddhas, or lotus flowers. But don't be greedy for these states, either, or in your delight, they will disappear.

This is the first day of the session and there is still much time in which to obtain a single unconfused heart and experience these fine states. Whatever you do, don't be lazy and wait around thinking you have a lot of time. You must recite earnestly and not waste your days. In the evening, during the Great Transference of Merit Ceremony, be even more sincere and determined to attain good results. If, instead, you waste your time, you will undergo all this bitterness for nothing. Won't that be a shame?

Day #2: December 9, 1972

*Blowing winds and still waters
expound the Mahayana;
Flocks of birds sing in choir, elegant and resonant.
With upright faith, upright vows,
and with upright practice,
Remember the Buddha, remember the Dharma,
and recollect the Sangha.
With vigor, perfect each of the
three levels of no-retreat.
In dhyana you may ascend through
each of the nine grades,
And meet in person Amita Buddha,
your compassionate father.
Such a reunion with your flesh and
blood brings happiness indeed!*

In the Land of Ultimate Bliss, the blowing breezes and the still waters proclaim the Dharma of the Mahayana, the Great Vehicle. White swans, peacocks, kalavinkas, and other birds don't screech or chatter, but assemble to preach the Dharma with eloquence and grace.

In your practice, it is most important to have right faith and right practice, and to leave deviant faith and practice far behind. Do not make the mistake of becoming attached to minor spiritual powers, which enable you perhaps to see spirits or strange creatures. That is of no great use.

Recollect all the Buddhas of the ten directions, all the Dharmas in the ten directions, and all the holy sages of the ten directions until you attain the splendid state called the "Buddha Recitation Samadhi". At that time every sound you hear sings

“Amitabha”.

Be vigorous and perfect the three levels of no-retreat:

The Three Levels of No-Retreat

1) Non-retreating Thought. One does not retreat from the resolve to attain Bodhi and to practice the Bodhisattva Way.

2) Non-retreating Position. One does not retreat from right orthodox thought, nor from the position one has already attained.

3) Non-retreating Conduct. One does not retreat but vigorously goes forward, cultivating the Six Perfections and the Ten Thousand Conducts.

Cultivation of both dhyana meditation and the Pure Land recitation leads to ascension through the nine grades of lotuses and to quick certification to Buddhahood.

Amita Buddha is our compassionate father, and if we merely recite his name, he will help us eradicate our worst karmic obstacles so that we may be born in the West, taking our residual bad karma with us where we can gradually eradicate all of it. When we are reunited with our father, our own flesh and blood, our happiness will be unspeakably great.

You have already endured three days of bitterness and now you should again bring forth the great Bodhi heart. Don't fear suffering, don't fear difficulty, and don't fear heat or cold. Advance with vigor to the Land of Ultimate Bliss!

Day #3: December 10, 1972

Here in the icebox three days have quickly passed. On the first day, someone thought, “I can't take it. I am cold because

there's no heater, and hungry because we only eat one meal a day. All day we sit and walk, sit and walk, reciting, 'Namo Amita Buddha,' and the more I recite, the colder and hungrier I get. I really can't take it."

But for two days he took what he couldn't take, afraid that the rest of us would call him a coward if he left; and now on the third day, he finds it much easier. "It's not important if I'm a little chilly, and a little hunger doesn't matter." It's all a test of your fortitude.

You haven't run off but instead have recited the Buddha's name, and accordingly your good roots have grown. I know that there are some who already have seen light, flowers, and the Buddha. Some have seen Amita Buddha rub the tops of their heads and transmit predictions of Buddhahood to them.

"Really?" you ask. "Why haven't I seen this?"

How can you ask such a question! You should ask yourself whether or not you have single-mindedly and sincerely applied effort which would cause such states to manifest.

"Oh," you say, "it's too much suffering--suffering so that I think I'm going to die."

If that's the case, then give up your life. What do you want your life for anyway? It is said,

*If you can't let go at death,
you won't obtain a good rebirth;
If you can't let go of the false,
you won't obtain the true.*

If you only wish to enjoy yourself, you'll have no share in the transcendental Dharma. If you wish to obtain the transcendental Dharma, to return to the root and go back to the source, then you have to undergo a bit of suffering and

view worldly dharmas as less important. Don't look upon trivial problems as being so weighty. I remember a poem Upasika Phuong wrote when she was at home with nothing to do. She gave herself a job and wrote:

*Alone and still I gaze from the balcony
At wave tops capped with flowers of white water
And pounding surf below, startling the gulls.
The water swells into waves and the waves subside
And disappear: defiled conditions cease.
Return to the root; go straight back to the source.
You're free to roam at will.*

Silent, as if entering samadhi, she saw the ocean waves wearing white flower caps and heard the roaring surf which frightened the seagulls into flight. The water swelling into waves is an analogy for afflictions arising in the self-nature, and the waves returning to the water represents our afflictions, however heavy they are, being transformed into the Bodhi self-nature. It is causing the defiled conditions to cease, letting go of all worldly dharmas. At this time you may return to the root, go back to the source, and view your own original face, free to do whatever you wish. But now, before we have returned, we must follow the rules and earnestly recite the Buddha's name until, with undeviating single-mindedness, we perfect the Buddha Recitation Samadhi. We will then be free to roam at will.

There's an old saying, "In the coldest weather, the pines are the last to lose their green." San Francisco has never had such cold weather; it's been under twenty degrees and most people are staying indoors with their heaters turned up. We aren't going outside either, but instead of a heater, we have turned on the coolers! Pine trees may be the last to be harmed, but we are

proving that we are vajra. Some of you could be comfortable at home, but have chosen to come here to recite the Buddha's name, cultivate, and endure the bitterness instead. This is very rare and has moved Amita Buddha who will certainly guide you to rebirth in the Western Land.

Here in San Francisco, Amita Buddha has entered the Vajra Samadhi and made the earth firm and solid. We should enter the Vajra Samadhi, too, and cause San Francisco to be as indestructible as vajra. Didn't I say last night that it wasn't that there couldn't be an earthquake, but rather that the earth was *not permitted* to quake? Amita Buddha is the one who is not permitting the earth to quake because his is the Land of Ultimate Bliss, and any place his name is sincerely recited is a part of the Land of Ultimate Bliss. If you don't believe me, wait until the fourth of January and see!

Day #4: December 11, 1972

That you are still pursuing your work so diligently, reciting the Buddha's name in spite of the cold weather, is a sure sign of your sincerity; if you were not serious you wouldn't be able to continue in this cold.

*Through whirling snow on icy cliffs,
whitening the sky,
Red lotuses burst forth today,
in bloom all over the earth.
In infinite layers the Buddha's light
illuminates all without end;
Each syllable of the Buddha's name
nurtures the Dharma-source.*

*In a finger snap the work is done
just as you had wished,
And disasters wrought in lives
gone by in a flash are melted away.
In contemplation, still and pure,
find constant happiness;
Superior persons' accomplishments in the end
are caused to bear their fruit.*

Here in the chill of the Great Hall it is we who are the cold cliffs and whirling snowflakes which fill the sky. Although the air is white with snow it is still possible for red lotus flowers to appear, because our recollection of the Buddha's name causes them to bloom. The flowers are not the small ones we are used to seeing, but they are as large as carriage wheels. Each person who recollects the Buddha will in the future be born within lotus flowers such as these. When the flower opens, one will see the Buddha and awaken to the patience with the non-production of dharms.

The Buddhas of the ten directions will emit light with which they will give us a physical examination to see if we have any illnesses. The examination takes place because we are filling out immigration papers for entry into the Land of Ultimate Bliss.

Whenever you recite the Buddha's name, you plant a seed in the field of the Dharma-nature. Reciting is also like applying fertilizer, for if you recite a lot and are sincere, your lotus will be a superior grade and the fruit will be superb. If your recitation reaches the level of single-minded concentration, then on the verge of death you will be without sickness and pain, just as if you had entered Chan samadhi. You will be reborn in the Western Land from within the lotus, which you have nurtured. If you do

not recite, the flower will wither from lack of nourishment.

If you continually apply effort, your wish will be fulfilled and you will be reborn in the flick of a wrist. Your karmic obstacles from past lives will instantly melt away so that you obtain the still, bright, pure, and permanent joy. When this happens, the superior person's job is done, his work perfected, and all his wishes fulfilled.

The most important point of recitation is to melt the drift of false thoughts so that one becomes pure and spotless, like the driven snow. So the verse speaks of "whirling snow on icy cliffs". The cold cliffs represent one's false thoughts. When the false thoughts are melted away, one can return to the origin, and be reborn in a red lotus, the lotus reserved for pure, undefiled people.

There is a simple analogy used to describe the Dharma-door of Buddha-recitation: a living being in the three realms is like a worm caught in a section of bamboo who is trying to bore his way out. In the practice of other Dharma-doors, one must crawl out step-by-step. For example, one must practice dhyana for a long time in order to attain samadhi. In following the Vinaya School, one must memorize volumes of rules and follow them without fail. Those who cultivate the Teaching School must read and recite the Sutras and lecture on the Dharma. They have to "divide the doors, discriminate the classes, articulate the schools, apportion the teachings"; and so it is said, "Endlessly discriminating names and marks, like trying to count the grains of sand on the beach, will only hang you up." Cultivating the Secret School one must pass through many stages. The step-by-step process is like the progress of the worm who gnaws his way up through section after section of the bamboo. There is, however, another worm in the bamboo who is smart enough to gnaw his way straight through the side of the stalk. The sections of bamboo represent the

difficulties encountered as one tries to leap out of the triple realm. Escaping through the side is like the Dharma-door of reciting the Buddha's name. You get out of the triple realm and gain rebirth in the Western Land, packing your karma from past lives with you. This does not mean, however, that you can continue to create offense-karma and expect to take it with you to the Pure Land. If you continue to create fresh karma, you are considered a hopeless case. Even the greatly compassionate Amitabha Buddha himself has no way to save you.

Day #5: December 12, 1972

Time passes quickly and we are already into the fifth day. How is your skill in recitation developing? Today two people came to ask for instruction. What did they want to discuss? Perhaps they came to report that they had obtained the Buddha Recitation Samadhi! Because the Dharma-door of reciting the Buddha's name has been opened, they can now bring up their questions if they wish, and allow everyone to examine them.

It is the custom in Buddhism that a person who has left the home-life and seeks instruction must first put on his ceremonial robe and sash, go before the Master, bow three times, kneel on both knees, join his palms respectfully, and then ask his question. A layman who has received the precepts may or may not observe this tradition. When these ceremonies have been performed the Master will then answer questions.

Today, when those seeking instruction arrived, I was busy and didn't have time to speak to them. If they don't wish to ask their questions publicly, they can come tomorrow after 2:30 and I will talk with them.

When people recite the Buddha's name they occasionally

see light; sometimes they see the Buddha; sometimes they see ghosts or spirits. There are both good and bad states which may arise. What states have all of you experienced? Bring them up and we'll look into them.

Disciple: "Because of my involvement with the class I am teaching, I have not been able to cultivate much this week. However, whenever I enter the hall I notice that the air around me is clear; it becomes quite pure as I recite the Buddha's name, as if my eyes could see more to either side, see further around my head. Also at times I have almost seen flowers which are not yet clear since I have not done much work. I can also feel the psychic heat energy when I am sitting in meditation, but again I haven't worked on it much yet."

Abbot: These are initial stages in your cultivation. Continue to work hard.

Day #6: December 13, 1972

Today the Buddha recitation session has already reached the sixth day. How is your recitation progressing? Have you reached the level of single-minded concentration? Or do you still experience furious flurries of fantasy? If you can arrive at the state of undistracted, single-minded concentration, then walking, standing, sitting, and lying down you are mindful of the Buddha. At such times, when your thinking ceases, even in the midst of a storm you are unaware of the blowing wind and oblivious of the beating rain. There is a saying, "The gales of wind can't penetrate and the driving rain can't leak in." Being thus, you are like the Buddha and have entered the state of the Buddha Recitation Samadhi. You have relinquished your mind and body, and the organs and objects have been cast aside. Within, there is no body

and mind; outside, there is no world. At that time not only are you unaware of other people, you don't even know yourself. Everything vanishes.

“What is meant by casting aside the organs and the objects?” one may ask.

The organs refer to the six sense organs: the eye, ear, nose, tongue, body and mind. The objects refer to the six objects of the senses: forms, sounds, smells, tastes, tangible objects and dharmas. Adding the six consciousness which arise between the sense organs and their objects, completes the eighteen realms, while the six organs and six objects alone comprise the twelve sense fields.

*The eye sees forms,
while inside there are none;
The ear hears sounds,
which the heart does not know.*

When the six organs are purified and the six objects are undefiled, the organs and objects naturally fall away and as a result the mind and body are free and at ease. When the body is at ease, hunger, thirst, cold, heat, fondness and resentment, sadness and happiness are unknown to it. This is the ability to remain unturned. When the heart is free and at ease then not one thought is produced.

*When not a single thought is produced,
the total substance manifests.
When the six organs suddenly move,
one is enveloped by the clouds.*

If one can refrain from producing a single thought, the great

function of the entire body comes forth. If the six organs move, the wisdom of your self-nature, which basically shines like the sun, becomes shaded by a covering of clouds and you lose your Selective Dharma Eye. Without the Selective Dharma Eye, you cannot see clearly; you cannot distinguish right from wrong, proper from improper. When this happens, no matter which way you turn you are obstructed, and you bump against the east and crash into the west. As if imprisoned in the four walls of a cage, you keep colliding coming and going, and can't get free.

The Four Walls of a Cage

Intoxicants include cigarettes and drugs as well as alcoholic beverages.

Beautiful Forms include material objects as well as members of the opposite sex.

Riches are something everyone enjoys. Day in and day out the main preoccupation of the majority of people is how to get more wealth. Their whole lives are based around the accumulation of money and they race after it in circles. The Chinese character for money (錢-*ch'ien*) is made up of two swords (戔) beside gold (金). People will fight to the death over gold. Most people bicker over money. Those who know how to use wealth can leap out of the three realms. Those who cannot, find it hard to escape from the karma they create. There is a verse which goes:

*Advised to donate to charity, he has no money--
he **has** it but he won't use it.*

*But, when an accident occurs he'll spend
thousands--which he may not have
but somehow gets.*

*If one mentions joining a beneficial activity--
he'd go, but he's too busy.*

*Yet on the day he dies and enters the grave,
despite his busyness, he has to go!*

I had a disciple named Kuo P'ei who had a substantial amount of money in the bank but wouldn't part with so much as a hair on his head. He said that he didn't have enough money to support a wife and family and so remained a bachelor. Eventually he developed appendicitis and had an operation, but the attack proved fatal. When he died he couldn't take a penny with him. The only thing he took along was his karmic obstacles. Isn't this pitiful and stupid?

Anger is hard to handle. Everyone gets angry. Everyone has a temper and some people even get so mad it kills them. I remember when Dharma Master Le Tu came to visit, accompanied by Layman Li, who tried to make an offering to me. I refused it and the layman said I made him so angry he almost died!

I often recite this verse for you:

*Fish in the water jump about,
People in the world clamor.
Knowing they should perform kind acts,
They steel their hearts and continue
to create bad karma.
Piling up gold and silver high as a mountain,
They go before King Yama with empty hands,
Weeping with regret.*

If you have the Selective Dharma Eye, you can discriminate clearly between the good and the bad. By mindfulness of the Buddha, we can select the proper path and avoid the pitfalls which surround us on all sides: intoxicants, beautiful forms, riches, and anger. To be able to do this is very important.

Day #7: December 14, 1972

A Buddhist Sutra says, “Though a great number of beings may cultivate, it is difficult for even one to succeed in the Dharma-ending Age. Only by means of the Dharma-door of reciting the Buddha’s name is it easy to succeed in cultivation.” We are presently in the Dharma-ending Age and the method of cultivation we are using in this session is the most appropriate, the most universal. It covers those with all three kinds of roots: sharp, dull, and ordinary. Not only do intelligent people benefit from reciting the Buddha’s name, but stupid and doubtful people do as well. One who is old and approaching death would do well to recite the Buddha’s name. For one who is in his prime with the promise of a long life ahead, it is even more beneficial to recite the Buddha’s name. One who is sick and undergoing great suffering gains benefit by reciting the Buddha’s name. One in good health profits even more from reciting the Buddha’s name. No matter who you are, you can recite the Buddha’s name.

Shakyamuni Buddha spontaneously spoke the *Amitabha Sutra* to exhort us to recollect the Buddha, and the final chapter of the *Avatamsaka Sutra*, the King of Sutras, is devoted to inspiring people to be mindful of the Buddha. You should not write off this practice as a Dharma-door for old ladies.

“But what meaning does it have?” one may ask.

What meaning do you want? To recite the Buddha’s name, your mindfulness must separate from all false discursive thought. When you reach this point your skill is perfected and you may return to the Western Land.

At the end of the Dharma-ending Age, all the Sutras will disappear. The *Shurangama Sutra* will be the first to vanish and so on until eventually the only Sutra left will be the *Amitabha Sutra*. After a hundred years, it too will disappear, and only the

words “Namo Amitabha Buddha” will remain. After another hundred years, these words will dwindle to just “Amitabha Buddha”, a phrase which will take numberless beings across the sea of suffering to enlightenment. When even the words “Amitabha Buddha” finally perish, then the entire world will be annihilated. From creation the world passes through the stages of dwelling, decay and emptiness; then another world is created, and the process begins again.

People also pass through the same cyclical process. They are born, dwell, decay and die. Production occurs during the first twenty years of your life during which you grow up and gain an education. For the next twenty years, you go to work and undertake various activities. For the next twenty years, you experience decay. Your eyes grow dimmer and dimmer, your hair becomes flecked with gray, and your teeth start falling out.

Your body is like a house. The mouth is the door; the eyes are the windows; the four limbs are the corner posts; the hair is the thatch on the roof. By the time the house begins to fall apart, it is too late to worry about fixing it up. You should have kept up with the repairs all along. When your house deteriorates, you move into another one; when your body decays, you also get another body. You should know that neither the house nor the body is yours.

“If my body is not me,” you may ask, “then what *is* me?”

Who knows?

The reason you have to be mindful of the Buddha is because you can’t find your “self”. While trying to discover “Who am I?” you are at the same time nourishing your Dharma-nature field. We must plant the seed, tend the sprouts, and reap the fruit. What is the Bodhi-seed? It is recitation of Amitabha Buddha’s name. What is the sprout? It is the appearance of your lotus in the Western Land. What is the Bodhi-fruit? It is your rebirth in the Pure Land, when

at the end of your life, the flower opens, you see the Buddha, and awaken to patience with the non-production of dharmas.

During this first seven-day session several people have received benefit. Some have tasted sweet dew, others' pulses have stopped; some have had their breath stop. Their outer breath ceased and an inner breath was born. Some experienced the cessation of all thought. These are the initial stages of light ease which result from a unified application of effort.

It is said, "If one wishes to escape death, one must first be a living dead man." Ignore trivial matters. Constantly return the light of your wisdom to illumine within. Seek it all in yourself. Turn your hearing back to your own nature and carefully examine the sound of your recitation. Is it clear? Is it full? Or are there instead the teeming hordes of false thoughts? There's a great difference between the two, you know. Recite well and don't let the time pass in vain.

Day #8: December 15, 1972

Today Kuo Wu wrote a verse:

*Amitabha by day; Amitabha by night.
Patient, alert to each sound, "Amitabha".
Amitabha, Amitabha--in the end where is he?
Forgetting yourself you **are** Amitabha!*

Day and night we recite the Buddha's name and with each sound we think of Amitabha. The phrase *Namo* means "homage". To whom are we paying homage? Ultimately, we pay homage to ourselves! On the day when you entirely forget yourself, the Amitabha of your own nature will appear.

I recall that in Hong Kong, a bhikshu who smoked cigarettes and didn't cultivate very much, all of a sudden decided to do a 90-day Standing Buddha Recitation Session. During such a session one walks without stopping for ninety days while being mindful of the Buddha. Since one does not sit or lie down, one's legs grow sore, one's feet swell, one's nerves become exhausted, and one's energy is drained. But in spite of the bitterness, one must continue to walk, for if one stumbles and falls, the session is over.

When the bhikshu told me he wanted to conduct the session at Ta Yu Mountain, I furnished a room in the temple for him to use. Not long after he began, he saw Amitabha Buddha right before his eyes. Mad with joy, he began racing around the room bellowing the Buddha's name. Hearing his loud cries, I knew something was wrong and went to see what was happening. As soon as I arrived, I saw what the problem was. He was not seeing Amitabha Buddha, but a huge water buffalo essence, which had been able to disturb his mind, since he didn't hold the precepts purely.

"How could a water buffalo appear as Amitabha Buddha?" you ask.

Heavenly demons and externalists can manifest in the form of Buddhas and Bodhisattvas in order to confuse people. "Don't be so excited," I told the bhikshu. "You should relax and quietly recollect the Buddha." In general, no matter what state occurs in your cultivation, it is essential that you remain detached. If you become attached, you may be attacked by demons. It was fortunate that I went to see what the matter was; if I hadn't, he would have been caught by the demon.

We are reciting the Buddha's name like members of a family working together; we criticize one another and offer one another our support. It is a matter of principle that I never reject anyone who wants to come here, and never detain anyone who wants to

leave. If you don't believe it, it doesn't matter, because, with me, everything is okay.

This past year many people have requested permission to leave the home-life under me. I always instruct them to first return home and cultivate on their own until their work blossoms into some attainment, for then their time will be ripe and it will be right for them to leave home. It is not certain that some of them could make it if they left home. They might not be able to renounce everything.

Today someone came asking to leave home. She has two children, one fourteen and one fifteen. I told her that it would really be better to cultivate at home until she can truly put everything down. If she comes back, there will still be time. I could have told her that it would be better for me to teach her children, because children aren't burdened with so much false thinking. If a youth can cultivate, it is relatively easy for him to make progress, and I am able to lead him to attain the Way.

When I was in Manchuria I had a fourteen-year old attendant who wanted spiritual penetrations. I told him that if he really wanted them it wouldn't be difficult, but that he would have to undergo a certain amount of suffering. He believed me and followed me for almost a year, while I led him through all kinds of bitterness. He had to bear the unbearable, eat the inedible. Once I was invited to receive offerings at a layman's house and I spoke the Dharma for them. We sat in meditation, as was our custom, for two hours before retiring. After an hour, however, the child lay down to sleep. I grabbed the pillow and threw it roughly on the floor. The child never slacked off again, whether I was with him or not.

Once, we were travelling after a heavy rain. About halfway home we came upon a piece of waterlogged pastry lying in the mud. "Master," he said, "look at that!"

“Eat it,” I replied.

He didn’t follow my instructions and when we got home I said, “It’s a pity you didn’t eat that biscuit we just saw, because if you had, you would have attained your spiritual powers.” When he heard this he began to cry. “It doesn’t matter,” I said, consoling him, “there will be many more chances.” And in fact, not much later he obtained spiritual powers--the heavenly eye and the knowledge of others’ thoughts. He knew former and future events and understood the workings of cause and effect. Why was he able to attain these powers so quickly? Because young children are pure and free of false thoughts it is easy for them to attain the Way.

I had six or seven such disciples in Manchuria who had similar accomplishments and they were a great help to me. We went everywhere rescuing people and spreading the Dharma, relieving living beings of their suffering. These disciples trusted me implicitly and would do whatever I told them to do. In fact, had I told them to jump into a pit of fire or into the ocean, they would have done so without hesitation. Of course, I would never have told them to do such a thing. The point is that they would follow my instructions to the letter.

It is my hope that in this country there will be those who attain the Way. This is why I am so severe with you and exhort you to endure suffering. An ancient said, “Having tasted the bitterness within the bitterness one can become a man above men.” The reason I am constantly urging you on is simply to bring about your enlightenment. The sooner you attain the Way, the sooner you can help benefit humankind!

Day #9: December 16, 1972

*You recite “Buddha”, so do I.
We both recite “Buddha”. Why?
To end birth and death and transform the Saha;
Everywhere is blissful--Amitabha!*

*What is there when there is no you or me?
Stillness; all creation’s void--contemplate and see.
When ignorance is broken and affliction severed,
Jump out of the three realm’s great river of love.*

Why do you and I recite the Buddha’s name? Stupid people say, “To help us gain peace and happiness and good fortune and to free us from affliction, suffering, and hardships.”

Others say, “We recite to increase our good fortune and prosperity.” This, too, is the reasoning of the dull.

We recite the Buddha’s name in order to end birth and death. Why do we want to do this? We are ceaselessly revolving in the wheel of birth and death. This life we are named Smith and next life Jones; this life we are the father and next life, the son; this life we are the master and the next life, the disciple, The whole thing is beyond our control. Don’t think that a person is no more than your dearest and most beloved husband or wife. In the past he may have been your benefactor or your enemy. That is why some husbands are devoted while others constantly fight with their wives. Don’t think that someone is only your dearest son or daughter. In the past, you may have been his debtor or he may have been yours. That is why some sons and daughters are filial and others are not. If you understand the principle, you will have no cause to curse heaven or blame others, and you will no longer wish to continue turning uncontrollably in the false realm

of men. You will vow to end birth and death and quickly leap out of the sea of suffering. When you put an end to birth and death you gain control. This means that if you want to live, you live; if you want to die, you can die anytime. You will know the time of your approaching death and you will not be confused. Your body will be free from disease and your mind will be free of defiling affection. As if entering dhyana samadhi, you will be borne off to the Western Land where you experience bliss. The Saha World will be transformed into a pure, clean land, devoid of afflictions and so the poem says, “Everywhere is blissful--Amitabha!” Mindfulness of the Buddha should reach the state where “you” and “I” disappear.

“That’s too dangerous,” you say. “If there isn’t anything at all, isn’t that just total emptiness?”

You should only fear that you won’t experience total emptiness, that you won’t discard material concerns, and that you won’t renounce affections. If you can forget everything, you will be liberated, because when you reach the state of “quiet contemplation in which the myriad things disappear of themselves” you will suddenly understand everything in the world. You will know why the pines are straight and the brambles crooked; you will know why the cranes are white and the crows are black. Since you understand everything, your afflictions will be gone and ignorance will be smashed. You will then have jumped right out of the three realms’ great river of love.

The three realms are the Realm of Desire, the Realm of Form, and the Formless Realm. It is within these that the huge river of love flows. “He loves her for her beauty and she loves him for his kind heart.” Rising and sinking, confused and muddled, you can’t break it off.

Someone would like to say, “Love and affection are the most meaningful aspects of human life! I don’t want to jump out

of the river of love!”

Keep wading around in it, then, but be aware that as long as you do, you won’t be in control. After you are born you will die, and after you die you will be reborn, and running back and forth you will be unable to escape the spinning wheel of birth and death. When you sink to the bottom it’s hard to float back up, for when you have become a tiny ant or a small worm, devoid of wisdom or blessings, you will easily die and quickly be reborn. Each life will be worse than the last and each death worse than the one before.

Someone says, “Buddhism lacks consequence. It’s merely a jumble of superstitions which I cannot accept.” If you don’t believe you can wait and see. However, it’s easy to fall and hard to come up again. Who knows how many great kalpas will pass before things get better? It’s difficult to be born human, difficult to be born in a central (or influential) country, and difficult to meet the Buddhadharma. Although it is hard to obtain a human body, you now have one; although it is hard to meet the Buddhadharma, you have done so. So push on with your work and don’t be lazy.

We welcome everyone who wishes to come and recite, but those who join us must obey the rules, and everyone alike receives the bitter and the sweet. No one is permitted to ignore the rules.

In reciting the Buddha’s name we want to arrive at the point of undistracted, single-minded concentration; therefore, we must follow the rules. Both those who want to recite and those who do not want to recite should be mindful of the Buddha; both the skeptics and the faithful should recite. I will now explain the words “confused” and “belief”. Those who are confused may have faith. What is to be feared is that one may have faith in that which is confused, in a deviant teaching. What is worse is to be confused and unbelieving; it is impossible to save such a one. It

is best to have faith and be unconfused. Faith and understanding of the proper Dharma enable one to follow it without attachment and, therefore, without confusion. We should seek our own enlightenment so that we can become free and at ease in body and mind.

Today another disciple wrote a poem:

*With six times eight vast vows and three provisions,
His vast compassion saves the simple and dull.
Nine grades are led before the sage and lord.
Limitless life has the Buddha with limitless light.*

“Six times eight” refers to Amitabha’s forty-eight great vows, and the “three provisions” refer to faith, vows, and practice. If you believe in the method of mindfulness of the Buddha, you should make a vow to be reborn in the Pure Land and cultivate vigorously.

You will then experience the Buddha’s compassion, which saves all beings regardless of race or nationality. The Buddha teaches the stupid and simple and makes no distinctions between young and old, clever and dull.

The “nine grades” refer to the types of rebirth from lotus flowers in the Pure Land: upper-upper, upper-middle, upper-lower; middle-upper, middle-middle, and middle-lower; lower-upper, lower-middle, and lower-lower. All the categories are led before the “sage and lord Amitabha Buddha” whose name means “Limitless Light” and “Limitless Life”.

This verse is not bad! If you constantly recite it you will be able to see your nature and see the Buddha. If you want to understand your mind and see your nature, you should make obeisance to this verse. I’m not joking! As the Fifth Patriarch told the great assembly, “You should all quickly bow before Shen

Hsiu's verse, which reads:

*The body is a Bodhi tree,
The mind like a bright mirror stand;
Time and again brush it clean;
Let no dust alight.*

Day #10: December 17, 1972

*One sentence less of chatter,
One sentence more of the Buddha's name;
Recite until your false thoughts die,
And your Dharma-body comes to life.*

During a Recitation Session it is best to recite the Buddha's name and do less talking. The four assemblies have gathered from the ten directions to recite the Buddha's name and the time is especially precious. Don't waste this rare opportunity. If you haven't as yet applied yourself, settle down and seriously recite. Be sure to follow the rules and avoid conversation. If you turn your mind solely to recitation you will receive a response which will enable you to cast out all false thinking and obtain the Buddha Recitation Samadhi.

Recitation is the easiest Dharma to cultivate, for you need only single-mindedly recite Amitabha Buddha's name and at the end of your life you will be reborn in a lotus flower, hear Amitabha Buddha speak the Dharma every day and in the future you will ascend to the position of Buddhahood. "Reciting in order to attain rebirth is one thing, but we are nowhere near death; why should we recite?" you may wonder.

That's a good point. But it is always best to prepare in advance. For example, a tree doesn't spring up over night; it takes at least ten years to grow to an appreciable size. We recite now so that at the end of our lives we will have undeviating single-mindedness. If we don't recite now, at death, when the four elements--earth, air, fire, and water--scatter, the pain will cause us to forget everything. How will we be able to recite? We recite ahead of time in order to obtain the Buddha Recitation Samadhi. Then walking, standing, sitting, and lying down we will never stop reciting; at the end of our lives we will be without sickness or pain. With undeviating single-mindedness we will certainly be reborn in the Western Paradise. One should always prepare in advance. Otherwise, one won't succeed and all one's efforts go to waste.

Chu Hsi said, "Don't wait until it rains to mend the roof; don't wait until you are thirsty to dig a well." The same applies to our recitation. If we don't know our destination in advance, when the time comes we will be all muddled and won't know where to go. If you are going on a vacation, you make preparations. If you don't, in the last minute confusion you are sure to forget something.

Does anyone have any questions?

Disciple: "I was raised a Catholic and what appealed to me about Buddhism was its rational quality, the practice of understanding the Four Noble Truths: suffering, origination, extinction, and the Way. In the Japanese Rinzai Zen and the Tibetan Buddhism which I have studied, the emphasis is placed on searching into one's own mind and by one's own efforts, realizing enlightenment in this very life. It is therefore difficult for me to understand the Pure Land practice which seems like a fairy tale of some distant land where, by relying on Amitabha Buddha, our problems will be effortlessly solved. I am most certainly not

asking this question out of arrogance, as I have only the greatest respect for the Master and hope that he will clear up my doubts.”

Abbot: “Can anyone answer this question?”

Disciple: “The Sixth Patriarch said that the Pure Land is just one’s own mind when free from afflictions. But I have a similar doubt.”

Abbot: “When you are reciting the Buddha’s name, do you think or not?”

Disciple: “I have been thinking of something ever since I was born.”

Abbot: “Do you want to think or do you not want to think?”

Disciple: “I most emphatically do not want to think.”

Abbot: “Then just recite the Buddha’s name!”

Disciple: “If I could cut off my head without bleeding, I’d do it right now.”

Abbot: “It would be better to cut off your legs; then you couldn’t run away.”

Good Knowing Ones, each of us has his own fantasies. While our thoughts to get rich, to become an official, or to obtain a Master’s or Doctor’s degree may be similar, the false thoughts which have accompanied each one of us since birth vary from person to person and are difficult to cast out completely. So this disciple said that if it would put an end to his false thoughts, he would gladly cut off his head. While this would end his false thoughts, it would also violate the precept against killing. In any case, he would simply undergo another rebirth according to his karma, and once again be subject to false thinking.

How can you get rid of your false thinking? By using the method of recitation you can grab your false thinking and chop its head off. We cut off the head of the false thinking thief and display it before the masses, but instead of using a knife, we use

the sword of wisdom. As I said last night, “Ignorance broken and affliction severed/ Leap out of the three realms’ great river of love.”

As I have told you many times, the Dharma-door of Buddha recitation is false, and so are dhyana meditation, the Teaching School, the Vinaya School, and the Secret School. You need only believe in it, and the false becomes true; if you don’t believe, then the true becomes false. You could also say that whatever is of no benefit is false. So the *Avatamsaka Sutra* says, “Everything is created from the mind alone.”

Someone wants to object, “Everything the Dharma Master says is false and I don’t believe any of it.”

Fine, then don’t believe. No one is forcing you to believe. Don’t take things as true and don’t be attached to them as false. The Buddhadharma is wonderfully flexible.

When the deviant person practices the orthodox Dharma, the orthodox Dharma becomes deviant: when the orthodox person practices the deviant Dharma, the deviant Dharma becomes orthodox. Buddha recitation is also false. We are using the false to fight the false, fighting poison with poison. There are three poisons:

Greed: I want to be born in the West.

Hate: I insist on being born there!

Stupidity: Will I be born there? I don’t know.

Our minds never stop thinking. We use the poison of Buddha recitation to give our minds something to think about; if they have nothing to think about, they are ill at ease. Reciting the Buddha’s name and seeking rebirth in the Land of Ultimate Bliss is also false thinking, but by using the false to stop the false, we

occupy our minds so that they won't indulge in other forms of false thinking.

Don't think that merely sitting still is investigation of dhyana. One who recites the Buddha name is also investigating dhyana. Walking, standing, sitting, and reclining, one may investigate dhyana. The ancients said,

*With both dhyana and the Pure Land
One is like a tiger with horns;
In the present age a teacher of men,
In the future a Buddhist Patriarch.*

*With dhyana, but without the Pure Land
Nine out of ten will take the wrong road;
Without dhyana and with only the Pure Land,
If ten thousand practice, ten thousand will go.*

If ten thousand people cultivate the Pure Land Dharma-door, ten thousand will arrive in the Land of Ultimate Bliss.

After the session, we will have a dhyana meditation session, and you can all go down the wrong road. It's not important; you can always come back again.

Someone is thinking, "The Dharma Master teaches us to take the wrong road. He is certainly not a Good Knowing One."

I never told you I was a Good Knowing One! But you need not be afraid of going down this wrong road. Who knows how many Sages have taken it and found their way home?! Did anyone tell them to do it? Why did they do it? Did they just want to try it out? Students of the Buddhadharma should understand this principle: Don't ask whether or not the Master is a Good Knowing Advisor; you're better off asking that of yourself.

Day #11: December 18, 1972

Time passes quickly and there's no way to stop it. The first session has passed and only three days of the second remain. You should recite in order to reach the state of undeviating single-mindedness and obtain the Buddha Recitation Samadhi. There's not much time left; don't waste it. You must conquer your thoughts and your gang of thieves. Who are in your gang of thieves? Its members are your eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body and mind. They are called thieves because they steal your essential energy. They rob you of control so that you run around doing their bidding. When your eyes see a beautiful sight or a pretty woman, they relay the message, "What a lot of fun! How beautiful!" They carry you away so that you forget to return. Unaware, you sink into confusion and the energy is stolen from your eyes.

The more your ears hear fine music, the more they want to hear. If you cannot give it up, the energy is stolen from your ears. It's the same for your nose, tongue, body and mind. Don't think that your six senses are so fine and enjoyable. You should know that they can be extremely harmful. If you can use them, you will realize the Way. If you can't use them, you will fall. If you are not turned by them, you will come to know the nature of the Treasury of the Thus Come One and penetrate the region of the wonderful. Turned by them, you sink into the endless revolutions of the wheel of rebirth. If you use them well you can perfect the three non-outflow studies of morality, concentration and wisdom. If you do not use them well, you create the three evil karmas of greed, hatred, and stupidity.

We recite, using poison to fight poison, in order to stop our thoughts. We should resolve to reach the highest enlightenment and not confuse ourselves by looking for what is correct or incorrect, true or false. Actually, the Dharma is without distinction between

true and false, and if you are attached to truth or falsehood, you fall into the secondary level of truth. It's important to remember that your successful cultivation reveals truth and your lack of success indicates falsehood.

The self nature is like empty space, fundamentally without truth or falsehood. At the gates of the six sense organs we have, for limitless kalpas, enacted a play. In birth after birth and death after death we have not escaped the turning wheel of the six destinies. Yet we continue to be attached to our bodies as something that belongs to us. How fortunate are those who haven't escaped the wheel of rebirth and yet have the opportunity to meet the Buddhadharma and receive the counsel of a Good Knowing One!

Recitation must be cultivated single-mindedly. No matter what method you use, if you don't put your mind to it, you will have no success. Don't stand with your feet in two different boats. You'll never get anywhere if you vacillate between north and south. You must turn your whole mind to cultivation of the Way. When your concentration reaches its ultimate point, you will certainly obtain advantage. For example, extreme suffering turns into bliss and extreme poverty into wealth. The affairs of the world revolve in just this way. So we shouldn't fear poverty, but work with our true hearts without wavering between belief and disbelief. What if you don't believe? Then just try it out and see. Give up your body and mind, turn your attention to reciting the Buddha's name, and see what advantage it holds. If your mind is true, you will certainly attain a wonderful state. If you half believe and half disbelieve, you will accomplish nothing.

When the Buddha was in the world, an old man who wanted to leave home went to the Jeta Grove where the

Buddha was staying. When he arrived, the Buddha was away receiving offerings of a meal, and the old man was received by the Buddha's disciples. They looked into his past causes and conditions and saw that during the past eighty thousand kalpas he had not planted a single root of goodness. Consequently, they did not wish to accept him, and they told him to leave.

In his sorrow, the old man thought, "I am so poor and utterly alone, I'd be better off dead!" He went to the Ganges, determined to throw himself in and end it all. Just then the Buddha, who was returning from his meal, came upon him and said, "What are you doing?"

The old man related his plight and the Buddha said, "It's not important. Come with me. I'll let you leave home." The old man wiped his nose and smiled. He returned with the Buddha, who personally ordained him. The old man certified to Arhatship on the spot. All the Arhats were amazed and asked the Buddha, "How could this old man without any good roots certify to the Way right after leaving home?"

The Buddha replied, "As Arhats, your Heavenly Eyes penetrate only the events of the past eighty thousand kalpas. It so happens that more than eighty thousand kalpas ago the old man was a poor firewood gatherer. One day in the mountains he met a tiger. Having nowhere to run, he quickly climbed a tree. When the tiger began to gnaw at the trunk, the man, frightened out of his wits, thought, 'Only the compassionate Buddha can save me.' Then he yelled, 'Namo Buddha! Save me, quick!'"

"Hearing the Buddha's name, the tiger ran off, and the man's life was spared. After that, although he never again recited the Buddha's name, that one good root he planted when he recited the Buddha's name remained. It has now matured and enabled him to certify to the fruit of Arhatship."

The *Lotus Sutra* says that anyone who recites “Namo Buddha” once will realize the Buddha Way. We have now recited not just once, but thousands of times. I deeply believe that you are certain to realize Buddhahood. It’s only a question of time. If you don’t, I will descend into the hells.

Day #12: December 19, 1972

Another disciple wrote a verse:

*Sweet dew is sprinkled on our crowns,
Our bodies emit an eternal light;
The three realms are viewed as illusion,
and the three periods of time but a dream.
All of creation only the mind--
originally unobstructed;
Manifold good deeds amass great virtues,
the heart becomes free.
Defiled conditions cast aside
we obtain our independence,
And soon are reborn in the Western Land
on a purple-golden throne.*

Because we recite the Buddha’s name, Guan Yin Bodhisattva comes to our aid and sprinkles sweet dew on the tops of our heads. Great Strength Bodhisattva’s brilliance illumines us. These two Bodhisattvas are Amitabha Buddha’s disciples and they have both made vows to help him propagate the Dharma.

With one recitation of the Buddha’s name a lotus forms.

“Then if I recite ten times, do ten blossoms come forth?”
you may ask.

No, but if ten people recite, then ten flowers come forth.

“Since one recitation brings forth one flower, why recite more than once?”

The more you recite, the better the flower. One must recite life after life, until the day arrives when one is born in the upper grade of superior lotus.

There are three realms: the Realm of Desire, the Realm of Form, and the Formless Realm. The Four Heavenly Kings and people reside in the Desire Realms. Their thoughts are deeply imbedded in desire and heavy defilements which weigh on their hearts. In the Formless Realm, all form has vanished and one obtains purity, but attachment to self remains because the eighth consciousness remains, keeping one from experiencing genuine emptiness and escaping the Three Realms.

Far from being peaceful, the Three Realms are like a burning house. Because people think and fantasize, they can't break their attachment to these false states. Don't think your body is beautiful and charming, for in reality it is nothing but a stinking bag of skin, not something to treat too fondly.

The three times are the past, present, and future. They are like a dream. When dreaming you don't know the dream is false, but when you wake up, you realize it was all an illusion. You might dream that you have become a great, wealthy official, but when you wake up, you know it was all unreal. If you can wake up and see through the dream, you will cease to hang on to anything.

Every aspect of behavior is not separate from the self-nature. One's self-nature contains everything, and thus “manifold good deeds amass virtue”. With no attachment one obtains liberation; if one can give up defiled dharmas he can become free and quickly gain rebirth on the purple-

golden lotus throne in the Western Paradise where he will personally behold Amita Buddha.

Day #13: December 20, 1972

Does anyone have any questions?

Disciple: “I do not understand the phrase in the *Amitabha Sutra* which says, ‘Those living beings who hear this should vow, “I wish to be born in that country.”’ I want to end birth and death and get out of the wheel of rebirth, the sooner the better! I don’t understand why one would wish to be reborn in that land.”

Abbot: A very good question. The answer to it can be found by examining Amitabha Buddha’s cultivation in past lives when he was planting the causes to become a Buddha. From the time he began practicing until he attained the Way, he endured uncountable sufferings. Therefore he made forty-eight vows in which he promised, “I vow that all beings in the ten directions will obtain rebirth in my country, the Land of Ultimate Bliss, if they but recite my name. When the flower opens they will see the Buddha and awaken to patience with the non-production of dharmas. If they do not realize Buddhahood, I myself will not realize Buddhahood.” The fact that Amitabha is already a Buddha proves that his vow is true, that everyone who recites his name will become Buddhas, too. It was these incomparably vast vows that caused Shakyamuni Buddha to speak the *Amitabha Sutra* without request.

The question is, “What is the good of being reborn in his land?” Birth in his land is not like birth in ours. We are born as a result of the union of our mothers’ blood and our father’s semen, impure substances. When born in the Land of Ultimate Bliss, one emerges from a lotus and enters a realm in which one is irreversible

with respect to the highest enlightenment--a realm where there is only bliss and no suffering. The blowing wind, and the waves on the shore, and the fragrances of the flowers all expound the Buddhadharma. Here one is able to realize the Buddha Way and put an end to birth and death. A verse runs:

*We vow to be born in the Pure Western Land
With nine grades of lotuses for a father and mother;
When the flower blooms, we'll see the Buddha
and awaken to non-production,
And take irreversible Bodhisattvas as our friends.*

Why does one vow to be born in the west, rather than the east, south, or north? Because Amitabha's Land of Ultimate Bliss is in the west. In the Pure Land you receive a lotus for parents. When the flower opens, your Buddha-nature, which has dwelt within it, emerges. From that time on you are neither born nor do you die, you are neither defiled nor pure, and you are a peer of non-retreating Bodhisattvas.

A few days ago, you mentioned the Sixth Patriarch's teaching, "Your very body is the enlightenment ground and your mind the Pure Land." At that time the Patriarch was speaking to those with keen dispositions, who upon hearing it suddenly united with the dhyana source, their bodies becoming that of the Buddhas. But our roots are dull. How can our very bodies become Buddhas? That is why we must depend on our practice to gradually quiet and purify our hearts and cut away our false thoughts. The Pure Land Dharma-door is the easiest method to practice.

Formerly all the Great Bodhisattvas like Guan Yin and Great Strength Bodhisattva, Universal Worthy and Samantabhadra Bodhisattva praised the benefits of the Dharma-door of mindfulness of the Buddha. The Elder Dhyana Master Yung

Ming Shou especially recommended the method of recollecting the Buddha as the most expedient, the most complete, and the easiest to cultivate. Even if you don't believe in it, you shouldn't slander it; not slandering it is just believing in it. The *Amitabha Sutra* speaks of the Buddhas of the six directions who bring forth the appearance of a vast and long tongue to praise the Pure Land Dharma-door. If it were not good, why would all the Buddhas have praised it? If you don't want to cultivate mindfulness of the Buddha, you can give it up and practice dhyana meditation instead. But in cultivating dhyana you cannot be afraid of suffering.

The two-week session of mindfulness of the Buddha will soon be over. Immediately following it, a week of dhyana will begin, and you will rise at 2:30 in the morning and rest at midnight. We'll see if you are up to it. If you're not, you can run away. If you can take it, then here in our icebox you can light your natural fire, melt the ice water, and calm the waves of your own nature. Water changes to ice, ice in turn becomes water. This refers to returning to the origin, finding the source, and seeing your own original face. If you can do this then your cultivation in our icebox will have been worthwhile and a lot of people will join us here. If, however, you die doing it, then no one will dare come.

Someone says, "What's the use of reciting the Buddha's name?"

What is the use of all your thinking?

Mindfulness of the Buddha is a substitute for your thoughts. When your thinking disappears, your heart is the Pure Land. There are four Pure Lands:

- 1) The Land Where Sages and Common People Dwell. After common people who are full of delusion have dwelt for a long time in the bud of the lotus flower, it opens at last and they see the Buddha.

2) The Land With Residue and Expedient Devices. Those of the Two Vehicles are reborn in this land.

3) The Land Adorned with Actual Retribution. This is where Bodhisattvas dwell.

4) The Land of Eternal Stillness and Light, where Buddhas and Bodhisattvas dwell.

Just why have we conducted this Buddha Recitation Session and recited the Buddha's name for fourteen days? It has been in order to sow seeds and cultivate our Dharma fields. The more we recite the better tended they are, and in the future they will certainly mature and bear full and beautiful fruit. It doesn't matter whether your mind is scattered or concentrated. It is said,

*When the clear pearl is thrown in muddy water,
the muddy water becomes clear.
When the Buddha's name enters the confused mind,
the confused mind attains Bodhi.*

This shows that Buddha recitation is inconceivable, for without extraneous false thinking, you nurture the merit and virtue of your own nature. There are four kinds of Buddha recitation:

1) Holding-the-Name Buddha Recitation refers to single-minded recitation of the name of Amitabha Buddha.

2) Contemplating-and-Thinking Buddha Recitation refers to contemplating and thinking about Amitabha Buddha:

*Amitabha's body is the color of gold,
The splendor of his hallmarks has no peer.
The light of his brow shines round a hundred worlds.
Wide as the seas are his eyes pure and clear.*

*Shining in his brilliance by transformation,
Are countless Bodhisattvas and infinite Buddhas.
His forty-eight vows will be our liberation.
In nine lotus stages we reach the other shore.*

3) Contemplating-an-Image Buddha Recitation refers to looking at an adorned image of Amitabha Buddha, reciting his name with your mouth, listening with your ears and thinking upon it in your heart.

4) Real-Mark Buddha Recitation refers to sitting in dhyana meditation and investigating, “Who is mindful of the Buddha?” We must find out who it is! Don’t lose track. If you do, you’ll get confused and won’t be able to return to your true home and see Amitabha Buddha.

Tomorrow is Amitabha Buddha’s birthday. We should all be sincere in our worship. Someone asked me, “I want to make an offering to the Master, but what shall I give?”

I replied that the best gift would be the recitation of the Buddha’s name. True recitation is a genuine offering; pure recitation is a genuine offering; wise recitation is a genuine offering. To recite the Buddha’s name with these three attitudes, the three non-outflow studies, is the greatest gift there is. If you bring forth a small heart, that’s a small offering. There is no finer offering than to recite the Buddha’s name because more than anything else, I like people to recite the Buddha’s name. But don’t recite my name; that’s useless. Recite “Namo Amitabha Buddha” and you will create inconceivable merit and virtue.

Day #14: December 21, 1972

Are there any questions?

Disciple: “Earlier, the Master said that there are no women in the Pure Land. The guest I brought to the lecture said afterwards that she found the evening interesting and enjoyable except for this one statement. She asked me if the Master was not an advocate of male chauvinism. I, too, don’t thoroughly understand why such a discrimination between sexes would occur in Amitabha Buddha’s paradise. Would the Master please be compassionate and instruct us?”

Are there any other questions?

Disciple: “I also questioned this when I heard it. It seems strange to me that amidst the vast expanse of lotuses in the Pure Land, all the beings who come forth would be male. What is the use of being male in such an environment?”

Why does a person born in the Land of Ultimate Bliss endure no suffering and enjoy every bliss? In that land there is perpetual happiness. Yesterday I said there are no women in the Land of Ultimate Bliss. Today I will say instead that there are no men. Do you think that your Master is confused? No matter what you think, that’s the way it is. My answer suits the occasion.

Everyone should understand that “in the Great Way there is no distinction between men and women.” When a distinction has been made, one falls into the secondary truth. The primary truth is expressed in the *Vajra Sutra*, which says, “There is no mark of self, no mark of others, no mark of living beings, and no mark of a lifespan.” How can there possibly be the mark of men and women?

Therefore, one can say that either the Land of Ultimate Bliss is inhabited entirely by men, or entirely by women. Regardless of whether they are men or women, they are without emotion and desire. Everyone’s self-nature is pure and blissful.

All living beings possess the Buddha-nature. The Land of

Ultimate Bliss is merely a manifestation of the mind. Your own heart is the Pure Land and your nature, Amitabha. The absence of false thoughts is the Pure Land, and freedom from affliction and the destruction of ignorance are Amitabha. You need only ask yourself if you can break through ignorance and cut off affliction and transcend sexual distinctions. If I said the Land of Ultimate Bliss was inhabited solely by men, the women wouldn't like it; if I said only women were born there, the men wouldn't want to go. Distortions of the eighth consciousness bring thoughts into existence and these create distinctions which cause us to suffer because of attachment.

We are now in the field of enlightenment cultivating the Pure Land Dharma. Because we still belong to the realm of living beings, heavy defilements weigh on our hearts, and we must sternly obey the rules until the defilements disappear and our perpetual discrimination ceases. The Land of Ultimate Bliss is the realm of the Bodhisattvas. There, neither men nor women have any desire based on emotion and craving. They are born from pure lotus flowers and thus differ from beings in the Saha World who are born from the union of their mothers' blood and their fathers' semen, carnal beings whose lives revolve around emotion and love.

You may have doubts about being born in a lotus, but nevertheless, the Buddha himself explained this principle and was praised by all the Buddhas of the six directions as one who does not lie, nor speak foolishly, unlike beings of the Saha World who are always getting involved in sticky conversations.

If you have reservations about the Pure Land, you should take more time to investigate these areas. With more research and study you will slowly understand.

If You Just Keep Reciting

I see that people are not very clear about the Dharma-door of reciting the Buddha's name, and so they do the reciting very sloppily and don't perfect their skill. In cultivation, investigating Chan is just mindfulness of the Buddha, and mindfulness of the Buddha is investigating Chan. People who are able to investigate Chan are the ones who are able to be mindful of the Buddha, and being able to be mindful of the Buddha gives you the ability to investigate Chan. People who are mindful of the Buddha are the Buddha, whereas that cannot yet be said of those who investigate Chan. The reason is that when you are reciting the Buddha's name, "Namo Amita Buddha, Namo Amita Buddha," then the only thing in your mind is a Buddha, and eventually you will become a Buddha. The reason Amita Buddha comes to guide living beings is that living beings have already turned into Buddhas, and so he leads their true nature to the Land of Ultimate Bliss, and then:

The flower opens and one sees the Buddha.

But those who investigate Chan are still looking for the Buddha, wondering, "Who's reciting the Buddha's name?" They are searching, and don't dare admit they are the Buddha they are mindful of. Instead, they look into, "Who is mindful of the Buddha?" "Who is able to be mindful of the Buddha?" "Reciting the Buddha's name is who?" They keep looking and looking, running outside. But when you are mindful of the Buddha, the Buddha comes back into your nature and you don't have to search outside. Buddha recitations are held so that for an entire week you don't have any other false thoughts--you're just mindful of the Buddha, and then you can become one with the Buddha. If you

can do that, then you are sure to be reborn in the Western Land of Ultimate Bliss. So the Dharma-door of reciting the Buddha's name is especially fine.

"Well, what about investigating Chan?" you may ask. It's good too. But when you investigate Chan you have to suffer. First, there is the pain to put up with, and then you have to make sure at all times you're not having false thoughts. If you compare the two, Chan is harder than reciting Buddha which you can do any time and anywhere: "Namo Amita Buddha, Namo Amita Buddha." If you are mindful of the Buddha, the Buddha will be mindful of you, and when the two mindfulness merge, you become a Buddha. This is a very wonderful Dharma-door! You haven't looked into it carefully, so you don't know its good points, and very few people attended when we held the session. It ended today, and now I'll tell you: You really missed a good chance. You missed it this year, but I hope that next year--this--year--you'll retrieve the chance and decide, "If there's another Buddha recitation session, no matter what, I'll take time off, however busy I am, and come recite 'Namo Amita Buddha'."

I'll tell you something else that is the absolute truth: What I like most is reciting Amita Buddha's name. When I'm asleep I recite, "Namo Amita Buddha", and I recite it in my dreams. When I'm walking or if I'm standing, I'm reciting, "Namo Amita Buddha". Walking, standing, sitting, and lying down are all done reciting, "Namo Amita Buddha". Amita Buddha is standing all around me, because Amita Buddha wants to become one with me so there is no difference between us. Would you say that was wonderful or not? Is there anything that could be more wonderful?

Reciting the Buddha's name is the most wonderful of Dharma-doors. You haven't recited to the point that you have skill, so you don't know what I'm talking about. But when you

get to that point, then to the exhaustion of empty space and the Dharma realm everything turns into “Namo Amita Buddha”.

You may say, “What use is there in that?”

Well, what use is there in your not reciting? There’s nothing better than to be able to be with the Buddha every day. I’m not trying to give you regrets by saying this, but this year it’s really too sad that you missed the opportunity. Why do I say that? Several millions of years have gone by without our ever encountering a Dharma assembly for reciting the Buddha’s name, but this life we have managed to meet that wonderful Dharma and the conditions are about to ripen. All of you think it over: in this country how many places are there where Buddha recitation sessions are held? Not just in America, but in the entire Western Hemisphere, there are very few such places--for I’m constantly looking into history, and there aren’t any. But now that we have had the chance, we’ve missed it. So, next year if there’s another Buddha recitation session held, no matter what, don’t miss your chance! Cultivation has to be actually practiced, you really have to do it!

In investigating Chan, not only do you yourself fail to become a Buddha, you even lose yourself! See how you wonder, “Who recites the Buddha’s name?” Basically you’re the one reciting, but you fail to recognize who you are and wonder “Who?” What’s the point in losing yourself? That’s not so important, but you even lose the Buddha! For you have to look for the Buddha outside. You investigate, “Who is mindful of the Buddha?” Without it occurring to you to ask, “Who is it who is the Buddha?” “Who is being Buddha?” “Who becomes the Buddha?” Even if someone does investigate, “Who becomes a Buddha?” they are likely to figure, “Oh, it’s him; it isn’t me,” and get it wrong too. It’s very easy to take the wrong road, which is why Chan Master Yung-ming-Shou said:

*With Chan and with Pure Land,
One is like a tiger wearing horns.
This life a teacher of people,
In the future a Buddha--Patriarch.*

*With Chan but without Pure Land,
Nine out of ten take the wrong road.*

That happens because you start to have doubts like, “Oh, it’s not me who becomes a Buddha. I can’t become a Buddha.” Yet, even though it’s easy to go astray, there are lots of people who cultivate Chan, for if no one cultivates it, that Dharma won’t exist. I, too, investigate Chan, and I’ve been looking for a long time for who’s reciting the Buddha’s name, all over the place. Have I had any luck? Well, I’m not looking anymore. Why not? It’s because now I’m learning to be lazy, and smart. I’m not as dense as I was before.

You may say, “Oh, we can do that too!”

You can try if you want--it will work if you are able not to have any false thinking. But if you still have false thinking, you have to keep on looking. You have to employ the Dharma to stop false thinking. But once you’ve stopped the false thoughts, you no longer need to use the Dharma.

By saying this I’m causing people to have lots of false thoughts, such as, “It’s not my fault that I missed the chance to do the Buddha recitation session this year. It’s because the Abbot didn’t tell us clearly. If I had known before, I would have made sure not to miss the chance.”

I did tell you clearly, several million years ago; but you didn’t pay attention and forgot. So now I’ve told you again. There were people I caused to miss the chance, since they wanted to go home and visit their parents instead of doing the session and I

said okay.

Now you may wonder, “How can the Abbot do that, and make them miss such a chance?” I have my reasons. I thought, “It’s also a good thing for them to be filial. They can practice filial piety first, and cultivate afterwards.” So it was my fault. I know that if I had said, “No! No one is allowed to go on vacation! Everyone has to stay and do the session,” than lots of people would have participated. But I didn’t say that, though a time may come when I do. Actually, though, you can do what you want, and “everything’s okay!”

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Verse of Transference

May the merit and virtue accrued from this work,
Adorn the Buddhas' Pure Lands,
Repaying four kinds of kindness above,
And aiding those suffering in the paths below.

May those who see and hear of this,
All bring forth the resolve for Bodhi,
And when this retribution body is over,
Be born together in the Land of Ultimate Bliss.