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The Right Method on "Praying
to the Buddhas and Bodhisatt-
vas in Fetching for Oneself" at
the Moment of Death

"Scenes at the Moment of
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Mastering of Time and Choice
of Methods

The Abstrusive Power of Prayers

True Reasons Why Prayers can
Produce Effects

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「臥佛殿」及「大般涅槃塔」

English version

The Contemporary Mahasiddha with Many Prophecies:
Spiritual Advice for Dharma Practitioners of this Degenerate
Age (1)

by His Holiness Chadrak Sangye Dorje

Rinpoche –

Translated by His Holiness' Humble Disciples

Yeshe Thaye & Pema Lhadren

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The Contemporary Mahasiddha with Many Prophecies

Spiritual Advice for Dharma Practitioners of this Degenerate Age (1)

by His Holiness Chadrak Sangye Dorje Rinpoche

Translated by His Holiness' Humble Disciples Yeshe Thaye & Pema Lhadren



*This modern age is often known as the “Degenerate Age” (**Kaliyuga**) by Buddhism as we are now living in an age of increasing five kinds of degenerations (1). In this way, as the five degenerations are more and more in evidence in our life-world, we are totally in the clutches of our past and present negative actions (**karmas**), and so we are very much confused as to what needs to be kept and what to abandon, as well as what needs to be done and what not. Hence, these are the times to try our souls!*

*There is a general **feature**, or characteristic, of people in this present life-world context: people in this age tend to have a built-in tendency to move in rapid motions, whether it be the “mind” itself, or in terms of actions and activities, and that whatever they do, be it good or bad, will be multiplied by hundreds and thousands of times. Then, there is another feature that is more related to the Buddhist Dharma practitioners: that there tend to be many disturbances in this life-world, many obstacles for practitioners on the Path and more obscurations for their Dharma practices.*

*It is for this kind of mentality and tendency that the **Second Buddha of our contemporary time Guru Padmasambhava**, with His most compassionate blessings, had specifically concealed those particular kinds of **Dharma treasures** as*



His Holiness Chadrak Rinpoche



His Holiness Chadrak Rinpoche

“Termas” (like the “time-capsule”), that are most suited to the sentient beings with these kinds of features in this modern life-world. His Holiness Chadrak Sangye Dorje Rinpoche, being generally recognized as the mind manifestation of Guru Rinpoche Himself in Tibetan Buddhism, has given us His Spiritual Advice for the Dharma practitioners of this Degenerate Age.

His Holiness Chadrak Sangye Dorje Rinpoche’s Spiritual Advice (1)

The following is the main excerpt from His Holiness Chadrak Sangye Dorje Rinpoche’s Spiritual Advice, which was given on December 26, 2000 at his own Salburi Monastery in Siliguri, India. Readers can also view this very special tape in the VCD on the **“Rainbow Body of the Nyingma School of Tibetan Buddhism”**, published by the Dudjom Buddhist Association (International).

“It is an auspicious day today as it is the first of the Tibetan month. All of you came from far away with a religious mind and a spiritual intention. Thank you for offering your service to the “Nyung-ne Temple”. I am going to give a little bit of advice that came purely from the Lord Buddha’s teachings. **Please remember how important it is to know precisely of what to accept and what to abandon for one’s own life!**

There are the ten “virtuous” actions, and there are the ten “non-virtuous” actions (2). Of course, we should try our best to do all the ten “virtuous” actions. **Among the ten “non-virtuous” actions, the worst of them all are that of “killing”, and the heaviest of them all are that of the “perverted views”.** As it is said: “there is no worse action than taking another’s life; of the ten non-virtuous acts, perverted view is the heaviest.” So

please refrain from any acts of killing, even the most minute insects.

If at all possible, please refrain from eating meat and become a vegetarian. If one cannot do this all the time, then at least try to refrain from eating meat at the three important dates of each month, namely: the eighth, the fifteenth and the thirtieth days (3).

Also, try to refrain from drinking and smoking, particularly as smoking will render “Phowa” (the “transference of consciousness”) ineffective. As “perverted view” (which includes the two most extremist perverted views of “eternalism” and “nihilism”) (4) is the heaviest, so **be very careful about this!**

During this time period of the Degenerate Age, the effects of our actions are very powerful either way, positively or negatively. Hence, human sufferings are increasing in this world, as most people are doing “non-virtuous” actions. Try to refrain from them, and instead try to do all of the “virtuous” actions.

As for the Sangha members, it is most important that we should adhere to our own “vows and disciplines”. If offerings, made by the faithful to the Sangha, are abused, it will bring enormous “demerits” and “bad karmas” to all those concerned. So **always be very careful about our own deeds!**

For all good or bad actions, the **intention** is the most important factor that determines whether they are positive or negative, heavy or light. In the same way, it is the **motivation** with which you listen to the Holy Dharma that is most important.

What makes an action good or bad? Not by how it looks, nor by whether it is big or small, but by the good or evil **motivation** behind it. In the **“Sutra of the Wise and the Foolish”**, it was said: “Do not take lightly



His Holiness Chadrak Rinpoche



Grur Rinpoche



Grur Rinpoche

small misdeeds, believing they do not harm: even a tiny spark of fire, can set alight a mountain of hay.”

So, **never underestimate the minutest wrong deed**, thinking that it cannot do that much harm. In the same way, **even the smallest positive acts bring great benefits**. Hence, if we have the negative mind, we will have the “three poisons” (**that is, greed, hatred and ignorance**), and/or the five poisons of (i) greed (**desire, attachment, etc.**); (ii) hatred (**anger, aversion, etc.**); (iii) ignorance (**confusion, bewilderment, etc.**); (iv) jealousy; and (v) pride.

Together with the eighty-four thousand negative emotions that evolved from them. Then, **with this negative mind, we will continue to do bad deeds which will eventually lead us only to the lower realms (5)**.”



Notes:

1. Five kinds of **Degenerations**, namely: (i) the degeneration of **beings** (**i.e. it is very difficult to help and tame them**); (ii) the degeneration of **views** (**i.e. false beliefs will spread**); (iii) the degeneration of **negative emotions** (**i.e. the five poisons will increase**); (iv) the degeneration of **lifespan** (**to be shortened by many death conditions**); and (v) the degeneration of **times** (**i.e. wars and famines, etc., will proliferate**).
2. Ten “**virtuous**” deeds refer to the refrains from: (i) killing; (ii) stealing; (iii) sexual misconduct; (iv) false speech; (v) frivolous and meaningless

talk; (vi) double-tongue or tale-bearing; (vii) slanderous speech; (viii) greed; (ix) hatred; and (x) ignorance or perverted views; while the ten “**non-virtuous**” deeds will be just their opposites.

3. The three auspicious days of each Tibetan month, namely: (i) the eighth day of each Tibetan month is the day of the **Medicine Buddha**; (ii) the fifteenth day of each Tibetan month is the day of the **Buddha Amitabha**; (iii) the thirtieth day of each Tibetan month is the day of the **Buddha Shakyamuni**. During all these auspicious days, the effects of both positive and negative actions will be multiplied by one hundred times.
4. The two most perverted views are that of “eternalism” and “nihilism”. “**Eternalism**” is the belief that there is a permanent and causeless creator of everything; in particular, that one’s identity or consciousness has a concrete essence which is independent, everlasting and singular in nature. “**Nihilism**”, on the other hand, is the belief in the non-existence of things when expired, such that when a person dies and his/her corpse is either buried or cremated, it is believed that he/she will no longer exist in this universe, and that he/she has just turned into thin air. For a more elaborate discussion on these two extremist views, please refer to the article “**Emptiness: Neither Existence Nor Voidness (16)**” on Issue 21 of the “**Lake of Lotus**”.
5. Lower realms refer to the three realms of the “**hell, hungry ghost and animals**”.



The Profound Abstruseness of Life and Death :

The Meaning of Near-Death Experiences (22)

By Vajra Acharya Pema Lhadren
Translated by Simon S.H. Tang

Excerpt of Last Chapter: Various Reasons on the Formation of Different Scenes at the “Moment of Death”

The “scenes at the moment of death” can be roughly classified in the following categories in accord with the varieties of the “main causes” and “auxiliary conditions”:

1. The “Separation of the Four Elements” – the “main cause” (the internal “consciousness” and “sub-consciousness”, including all kinds of memories) conjoins with the “auxiliary conditions” (the ‘Separation of the Four Elements’ in the external circumstances) in forming the “scenes at the moment of death” (please refer to the articles on “The Meaning of Near-death Experiences” in Issues 8 and 20 of the “Lake of Lotus”).
2. The “Endorphins Inside the Brain” – the “main cause” (the internal “consciousness” and “sub-consciousness”) conjoins with the “auxiliary conditions” (the “endorphins inside the brain” of the external circumstances) in forming the “scenes at the moment of death” (please refer to the article on “The Meaning of Near-death Experiences” in Issue 21 of the “Lake of Lotus”).
3. The “Karmic Forces” – the “main cause” (the internal “consciousness” and “sub-consciousness”) conjoins with the “auxiliary conditions” (the “karmic forces” of the external circumstances) in forming the “scenes at the moment of death”. This can be further classified into the following two kinds:
 - (i) Wholesome Ones – arising from: (a) virtuous retributions (please refer to the article on “The Meaning of Near-death Experiences” in Issue 21 of the “Lake of Lotus”); and (b) the efforts of one’s Dharma practice (the main theme of this article in this issue).
 - (ii) Unwholesome Ones – arising from: (a) vicious retributions; and (b) the forces of karmic creditors in seeking compensations on one’s karmic debts.

“Scenes at the Moment of Death” formed by “One’s Own Forces of Dharma Practice”

In the last chapter, we had discussed the “scenes at the moment of death” which are derived from either the “Separation of the Four Elements”, or the “endorphins inside the brain”, as the “auxiliary conditions”, in conjunction with the “consciousness” and the “sub-consciousness” as the “main causes”, either good or abominable illusions are projected quite distinctly and stably. Those phenomena are easily identifiable, and they would not be swinging in-between good and abominable. Since both of these two “auxiliary conditions” are temporary physiological phenomena, a deceased person would already lose most of the influences before the “spiritual body” really disengages itself from the “physical body”. Hence, regardless of good or bad, those “scenes at the moment of death”, which were composed by these two factors, could not adequately imply or determine the deceased person’s forthcoming destiny of transmigration.

As these two factors have already started their influences before the deceased person ceases his/her breaths. Therefore, if the scenes being seen are abominable, both the dying person and his/her kith and kin would be scared to death when recapitulating them. If the deceased person is a Dharma practitioner, who has no ideas about the reasons for the arising of these “scenes at the moment of death”, and neither does he/she has the command on the mode of operations in the posthumous world, this person would lose confidence, would even waver in his/her faith as to where to turn to, and so eventually he/she would end up in proceeding towards the “bad realms” (that is, the realms of animals, hungry ghosts, hell).



If the scenes are good, the deceased person and his/her kith and kin might become over-optimistic and forget about being calm and cautious. If the deceased person is a spiritual practitioner, he might become too relax, and thus forget about being conscientious in one’s concentration on one’s Dharma practice. Once deepening into the stage of death, the scenes can turn around suddenly from good to abominable, and if the deceased person is unable to take command on the mode of operations in the posthumous world, he/she would also be at a loss and floundering around, ending up in one’s transmigration into the “bad realms”.

Usually, the bystanders would usually give strained interpretations and draw far-fetched analogies about the “scenes at the moment of death”, and pepper the stories with great flavors of superstition so as to win the belief of the congregations, thus giving rise to the numerous so-called auspicious appearances about rebirths which might confuse the Dharma practitioners’ judgments, and can end up in the deferral of one’s Dharma practice, thus affecting one’s transmigration in the future. On the reasons for the generation of the “scenes at the moment of death”, one must need to have profound understanding of them in a rational and wise manner, without having any irrational elements of superstition.

The “scenes at the moment of death” that have derived from the “karmic forces” as the “auxiliary conditions”, in conjoining with “consciousness” and “sub-consciousness” as the “main causes”, are extremely unstable phenomena which, regardless of good or abominable, would be changing instantaneously. When the “karmic forces” are involved with the “auxiliary conditions” of the “scenes at the moment of death”, situations of either bi-directional or even multi-directional interactions would occur. Depending upon the wrestling interactions between the “assaults of karmic creditors” and the “protections offered by karmic retributors”, the situations would evolve relentlessly, and so the outcomes of their goodness or badness are most uncertain. Some cases have more precisely proven that the “scenes at the moment of death” are not purely induced by illusions due to physiological changes (please refer to the different Cases of 22, 25, and 26 in the article on “The Meaning of Near-death Experiences” in Issue 21 of the “Lake of Lotus”).

This sort of driving forces with the “karmic forces” as “auxiliary conditions”, after a person ceases one’s breaths, would gradually become more and more severe until the deceased person has been reborn. The only way to diminish the influence of “karmic forces” is to make use of the “main causes” (“consciousness” and “sub-consciousness”) as resistance. That is, to enhance one’s “mental strength” through Dharma

practice, such that the “main causes” could overcome the “auxiliary conditions” of “karmic forces”. However, **extra attention** must be paid to the **crucial points of whether** the methods of Dharma practice are **astray or not**, and whether they are “up-to-the-point” or not?

If the “scenes at the moment of death” are derived from the efforts of one’s own Dharma practice, as **one’s “mental strength” is the main driving force** such that the influence of karmic forces would be diminished, and so by conjoining with the “endorphins inside the brain” released shortly before one’s death, then good “scenes at the moment of death” would be successfully crafted by one’s mind. For instance, to be able to visualize the “Buddha-field or Pure Land”, or with scenes of having Buddhas and Bodhisattvas coming to fetch for oneself.

However, caution must be given to the situation that: **if a Dharma practitioner deems those scenes as solely the results of one’s own efforts in Dharma practice, while ignoring the influences of the “endorphins inside the brain”, and thus becomes over-confident and too relaxed.** Moreover, the methods of Dharma practice were **wrongly focused** while one was still alive, such as not emphasizing on the training of one’s “mental strength”, or that the methods of Dharma practice had been put astray, and so causing a poor quality in one’s “mental strength”. All in all, these would lead to one’s own failures. When the **influence of the “endorphins inside the brain” disappears, when one’s own “mental strength” is inadequate,** a good scene might **all of a sudden turn into an abominable one.** Why would such a stray method of Dharma practice, or a poor quality of one’s “mental strength”, have such profound impacts?



Stray Methods of Dharma Practice and their Impacts

There were numerous cases about the good “scenes at the moment of death” that had been documented in various literatures, such as: the visualizing of the “Buddha-field or Pure Land”, and the scenes of having the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas coming to fetch for oneself. For records that had been recorded in a relatively **systematic and factual way, with neither exaggerating nor concealing the facts,** one may refer to the relevant Japanese documents. Since the Japanese records were done in a very **conscientious manner and were heeding to the actual situations,** they are **much more trustworthy.**

The “Pure Land School” of Buddhism was propagated to Japan during the period at around 400 A.D. Some junior monks were instructed to stay beside those monks who were about to die, and to jot down all their

experiences on the “scenes at the moment of death”. By the eleventh century, the total collection of these records was over one hundred cases. There were both good and abominable “scenes at the moment of death”. As an honest and faithful Dharma practitioner with wisdom, one should endeavor to **improve on the methods of Dharma practice for the spiritual elevation of all sentient beings.** However, this does not mean that one can, by hook or by crook, alter the sutras and sastras, as well as to exaggerate on the facts, or to avoid the weaknesses.

Dharma practitioners with wisdom should **use their efforts to enrich their learning experiences, explore the principles on the truth, and carry out honest analyses of the situations** for assisting the future sentient beings, as well as to propagate the true and genuine Buddhist teachings **in its totality; instead of merely caring about the survival and prosperity of one’s own religious sect.** There are reasons for the arising of both good and abominable “scenes at the moment of death” (**please refer to the detailed explanations on the “scenes at the moment of death” in the article on “The Meaning of Near-death Experiences” in Issue 21 of the “Lake of Lotus”**).

If a person only claims one-sidedly that Dharma practitioners would definitely have good “scenes at the moment of death” and boosts about the reasons of their arising, while concealing the occurrences of abominable “scenes at the moment of death”, it is a kind of wrongdoing. Though the motivation may be to enhance the confidence of Dharma practitioners and the general public; yet, at the same time, it would **preclude the route** through which the sentient

beings could explore the true reality of facts for the further improvements in their methods of Dharma practice and for spiritual elevation. What would be the outcomes for this kind of deviation? Would it be good or bad for the sentient beings, especially for their future rebirths?

Master Shan Dao of Tang Dynasty (A.D. 613 – 681) was most earnest in the dissemination of the teachings of the “Pure Land School” through the descriptions of good “scenes at the moment of death and of the splendors of the Pure Land. Unfortunately, Master Shan Dao did not mention about the abominable “scenes at the moment of death”, neither did he mention the rapid changes in the posthumous world. He only spoke on the good side of it. Why do abominable “scenes at the moment of death” occur? (Please refer to the detailed explanations on the abominable “scenes at the moment of death” in the articles on “The Meaning of Near-death Experiences” in Issues 8, 20 and 21 of the “Lake of Lotus”). It could have been that Master Shan Dao was not clear about them, and neither did he realize them and the reasons behind them. He merely knew that it was a kind of “unwholesome karmic retributions” but did not know their meticulous contexts. This is also the prevalent shortcomings of the contemporary propagators of Buddhism.

All in all, any factors that might negatively affect the image of one’s religious sect, such as some of the abominable “scenes at the moment of death” that were encountered by the dying monks, were not mentioned by either Master Shan Dao himself or the contemporary propagators of Buddhism. If they had known those illusions, that were derived from the effects of the “Separation of the Four Elements” and the “endorphins inside the brain”, were just a natural



phenomenon that could occur to anyone, including senior Dharma practitioners, and if they were willing to disseminate the Buddhist teachings in an un-biased manner, and would tell the truth frankly, regardless of whether they were good or bad, the following tragedy would not have happened at all.

According to the description in an article in the “Anabiosis: The Journal for Near-Death Studies” by Carl Becker, a professor at the Kyoto University of Japan, Master Shan Dao was described as a fanatic propagator of the “Pure Land School” of Buddhism. According to the article, since the “Pure Land” that was described by Master Shan Dao was too vivid and attractive, there had been at least one incident whereby a person had chosen to take the so-called “shortcut” by committing suicide a few days after his listening to such kind of preaching by Master Shan Dao. The purpose of that person’s committing suicide was to advance his rebirth to such an attractive “Pure Land”, while his method was to follow exactly the knack on the “reciting of the Buddha’s Holy Names” as according to the “Pure Land School”. It was believed that, in this way, it would definitely be successful. According to the literatures of the “Pure Land School”, it had never mentioned that a person who would, “reciting the Buddha’s Holy Names” while committing suicide, not be successful. In fact, it had mentioned that even a greatly-sinned bad and wicked person could also make it.

In fact, would the “scenes of being fetched by the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas at the moment of death” definitely occur to those Dharma practitioners who have concentrated on practicing the teachings of the “Pure Land School” when they die? Even if such kind of scenes were seen, does it necessarily mean that those persons would definitely be successful in their rebirths into the “Pure Land”? In the aforesaid article, why was it mentioned that Master Shan Dao was a fanatic propagator of the “Pure Land School” of Buddhist teachings? Was there any supporting evidence? What would be the outcomes of over-embellishing the efficacious auspicious appearances of rebirths?

Master Shan Dao had become a monk and started learning the Buddhist teachings at the age of 10. For his own practice, it was said “whenever he entered into the room, he would keep on kneeling down and chanting the ‘Buddha’s Holy Names’ until he was completely exhausted.” As to his work on the propagation of the Dharma teachings, for over thirties years, his preaching would merely focused on the knack of the “Pure Land School” without any exceptions. Master Shan Dao had never sedulously gone after the worldly concerns of fame, wealth and glory, but was too earnest in the dissemination of the

Dharma teachings for the prosperity of the “Pure Land School” of Buddhism. He **had authored large volumes** on the “Pure Land School” of Buddhism. Though he was revered as the Second Patriarch of the “Pure Land School” during the Song Dynasty, but, in fact, he was **practically the real founder of the “Pure Land School”** of Buddhism. Master Shan Dao spared no times and efforts in promoting all sorts of wonders and solemnities of the “Land of Great Bliss in the West”, as well as on the various benefits in taking refuge and belief in the “Pure Lands”, in order to satisfy the spiritual needs of his disciples.

According to Volume 28 of **“A General History of the Buddhas”**, there were collections of articles depicting the **“Stories of the Transmigrations of the Wicked Groups”** during the Tang Dynasty. In them, great many stories of people who **had changed from vicious to wholesome deeds** were recorded, in which these people had carried out Dharma practices in the chanting of the “Holy Names of the Buddhas”. On the good side of it, there was a case in which a butcher by the name Jing in the city of Chang An, under the exhortation of Master Shan Dao, took refuge in Buddhism and believed in the “Pure Land School”. On the bad side of it, due to the great promotion by Master Shan Dao, many people had **used the means of committing suicide** in order to try for “advance rebirths” to the “Land of Great Bliss in the West”.

For instance, there was such a record in the **“Newly-edited Stories on Rebirths”**: “The monks (**bhikkhus**), nuns (**bhiksunis**), and people from all walks of life in the capital city of Chang An and other provinces had committed suicide at their old age. They did so by either drowning themselves in deep rivers, or by jumping down from tall trees. It was also heard that there were **over a hundred cases** everywhere far and wide about people who had burnt themselves as offerings (**to the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas**). Those people who had practiced the “Brahmin deeds” (**that is, to abandon mundane lifestyles, including the practice of celibacy**) by abandoning their wives and children, those people who had chanted the **“Amitabha Sutra”** 100,000 to 300,000 times throughout their lives, those who had chanted the “Holy Name of the Buddha Amitabha” 15,000 to 100,000 times everyday, as well as those who had achieved rebirths in the “Pure Land” through “deep concentration in the chanting of the Buddhas’ Holy Names” were all countless in number.” (**Please refer to page 158, Volume 83 of the “Taisho Buddhist Canon”**.)

From the relevant historic documents and materials, it has been made known that during the periods of the Masters Tan Luan and Dao Cho (**in fact, Master Dao Cho was the teacher of Master Shan Dao**), there was still no such precedence of **“abandoning one’s**

life for rebirth” through committing suicide. However, during the era of Master Shan Dao, there were quite a few incidents of “suicidal episodes”, as well as the **“abandoning of one’s life for rebirth”**. These cases have shown that, due to the **extreme, strayed and fanatic** guidance and teachings of Master Shan Dao, some of the followers of the “Pure Land School” had wrongly fallen into an “unwholesome regime, which was **not** the original purpose and objective of **Buddhism”**.

As for Master Shan Dao himself, how did he pass away? According to the **“Monographs of the Paradises”** in **“A General History of the Buddhas”**: “Master Shan Dao suddenly told the people one day, ‘This physical body is disgusting, and so I will return to the Land of the Great Bliss in the West soon’. He then climbed up a willow tree in front of the monastery, and prayed towards the west by saying, ‘I pray and wish that the Buddha would come to fetch me, with the Bodhisattvas also coming to help me, such that my mind will not be astray from the ‘right thoughts’, and will not be afraid, so that I can be reborn into a blissful place for peaceful living’. After which, he **jumped down** from the tree **and killed himself**.”

However, “frank statements of the truth” might not be conducive in **safe-guarding** the interests and benefits of most religious parties. After all, most religions usually would need to have more supernatural flavors for their promotions. In world history, there were cases on the murdering of scientists and/or heretics in order to avoid the exposures of the truth to the general public. Hence, it would be no surprise at all, on the alteration of a religious master’s death cause, as it was only a minor issue, and was nothing to be of great concern with no big deal. Therefore, there were some other more **memorable versions** concerning the death of Master Shan Dao.

Regardless of the different versions of it, this has illustrated an important fact that: in the **propagation of the religious teachings, it must have to be rational and should never be based on superstitions**. Neither should it be motivated by the thinking of only safe-guarding the interests of one’s own religious sect, without taking into account the vast important interests of all sentient beings, such that a one-sided story on the positive episodes of one’s own sect was being told, while neglecting and burying away the negative sides of it. Otherwise, it would ultimately be harmful to “oneself, other people and the whole religion”. In recognition of the fact that the propagators of Buddhism will strongly **affect** the directions of the “minds” of all other sentient beings, and will **determine** their future directions of rebirths, and so they must have to **seek truth from the facts, and should not distort, stray away from, or reject** the correct concepts and principles of the authentic Buddhist teachings. For instance,

one should not reject the right “cognitions about the posthumous world”, and the teachings of how to deal with it. (Please refer to the DVD on “Practical Training in Exoteric and Esoteric Buddhist Teachings (5): ‘Deviated Mental Strengths’ Would Lead to Failures in One’s Practical Training”, published by the Dudjom Buddhist Association).

The Lord Buddha Shakyamuni Himself had never behaved like this. He was rightly respected by all as the “Root and Fundamental Teacher” for all sentient beings in this contemporary era of the whole wide world since He was the “Buddha”, the “Perfectly-Enlightened Being”. He was, indeed, very rational in His “frank proclamations” of the “truth of the universe” that He had realized, all of which were based upon strong evidences such that the interests and benefits of all sentient beings were put in the first priority. Since the Lord Buddha had considered the interests and benefits of all sentient beings from all aspects in its totality, and so He had taught both the “Sutras of Absolute Meanings” and the “Sutras of Interpretative Meanings” so as to suit the various categories of sentient beings with different capacities. Both kinds of Sutras were teachings by the Lord Buddha’s “frank proclamations” of the “truth of the universe” that He had realized. This was, indeed, a way of extreme wisdom by the Lord Buddha. (The “Sutras of Interpretative Meanings” are not the ultimate truth but expedient teachings, while the “Sutras of Absolute Meanings” are of the ultimate truth and a thorough way of salvation.)

The Right Method on “Praying to the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas in Fetching for Oneself” at the Moment of Death

All the sentient beings would hope to see the “deities or Buddhas” in whom they believe to come and fetch for them at the moment of death. Moreover, they all hope that they could be reborn into the lands of their “deities or Buddhas”. In achieving them, the first step is to realize the real principles behind the achievements of these goals. Regardless of what belief or religion it is, one must have to include the training of “mental strength” as one of the elements in the training of one’s Dharma practice, so as to achieve these goals.

If a person wants to see the “deities or Buddhas” in whom he/she believes to come and fetch for him/her at the moment of death, one must have to receive training on “mental strength” while one is still alive for the direct connections with those “deities or Buddhas”. For example, a person should believe, in deep faith, in the capabilities of the “deities or Buddhas”, and be able to maintain their images, having strong feelings



of their existences in mind, with vehement passion of great respect. For every moment, the person feels that he/she is co-existing together with the “deities or Buddhas”. The stronger such kind of “mental strength” one has, the higher rate of success one can have.

If a person wishes to visualize the “Buddha-fields or Pure Lands” at the moment of death, one must have to receive training on “mental strength” while still alive for the direct connections with those “Buddha-fields or Pure Lands”. For example, a person should believe, in deep faith, in the existences of these “Buddha-fields or Pure Lands”, and be able to maintain their shapes and images, having strong feelings of their existences in mind, and at every moment being filled with vehement passion of affection. The stronger such kind of “mental strength” one has, the higher rate of success one can have.

What is the main principle in achieving these objectives through the training of one’s “mental strength”? The “Maha-vaipulya-buddhavatamsaka-sutra” (simply, or better, known as the “Avatamsaka-sutra”) has mentioned that “everything comes from the mind”. In order to rescue all those sentient beings who have always wrongly reborn into the “evil realms” (that is, the realms of animals, hungry ghosts and hell), the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas have specially constructed some kind of a paradise with their “mental strengths” so that these sentient beings can dwell in them and can mainly focus on their own Dharma practices. This kind of a paradise is known as the “Pure Land”.

If a person wishes to be reborn into the “Pure Land”

after death, one must have to develop some kind of a linkage with this “Pure Land” while one is still alive. The method of connection has already been revealed in the “**Avatamsaka-sutra**”. As all kinds of existences come from the “mental strengths” of our minds, and so the connections among all things will have to be dependent upon the inter-relationships of our “mental strengths”. The construction of a “Pure Land”, through the “mental strength” of one’s own mind, with a same structure to that constructed by the “mental strengths” of the Buddhas is definitely the **most direct linkage and connection**.

Therefore, the “16 kinds of contemplations on the Buddha Amitabha”, as mentioned in the “**Sutra of Contemplation on the Buddha of Infinite Life**” (《佛說觀無量壽佛經》 or the “**Amitayur Dhyana Sutra**”), demanded the sentient beings who **desire** to be reborn into a “Pure Land” have to **train their “mental strengths” through different “contemplations and visualizations”**. The main theme of one’s “contemplations and visualizations” has to be the images of the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas, as well as the configuration of the “Pure Land”. From **the first to the thirteenth** kinds of “contemplations and visualizations”, they are mainly focused on the training of one’s “**mental strength**” and “**mental concentration**”, and so these are **mainly** methods of “**self-reliance**”.

Those sentient beings who, having practiced these “contemplations and visualizations” accordingly while they are still alive, would be able to **make direct linkages** with the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas, as well as with the “Pure Land”. After their deaths, it would be much easier and much more confident in making direct connections with the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas in asking them to come and fetch for them. Even if connections could not be made, but since those sentient beings who have already practiced these “contemplations and visualizations” would have the cognitions on the “Pure Land”, and so the communal linkages of their “mental strengths” might bring about communal interactions of their magnetic fields, and thus leading to further enhancement on their higher rates of success to be directly reborn into the “Pure Land”, without having to wait passively for the arrivals of the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas in fetching for them.

As from **the fourteenth to the sixteenth** kinds of “contemplations and visualizations”, they are supplementary trainings for those sentient beings whose “mental strengths” are not up to the required standards, as well as for those believers with lower standards, or for those who have “committed transgressions of their ‘**Precepts**’ (or “**silas**” in Sanskrit)”. These methods are **mainly dependent upon** “**external powers**”, and not on the intensities of one’s own “**mental strength**” and “**mental concentration**”. So

long as these **sentient beings have the minimal level of “mental strengths”**, they would **have a chance of salvation** by the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas (“**external powers**”).

Why did it not say that all the sentient beings would definitely be rescued, but just instead to have a chance of salvation? The **key to this question is whether or not the sentient beings could, through their “mental strengths”, make connections with the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas in asking them to come and fetch for them?** If the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas do not know who those persons are that are in need of help, then how would they proceed to render their rescues to them? Hence, all the exoteric Sutras or esoteric Tantras have revealed that those **sentient beings, whose trainings on both “mental strength” and “mental concentration” are inadequate**, should keep on “contemplating and visualizing”, or in the chanting of the mantras, or the “Holy Names of the Buddhas”, for the **further enhancement of their “mental strengths”**, until they could make the connections with the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas.

The most obvious example was the teaching of the Lord Buddha Shakyamuni as recorded in the “**Sutra on the Buddha Amitabha**” (《佛說阿彌陀經》 or the “**Smaller Sukhavati-vyuha-sutra**”): “... Sariputra, any virtuous man or woman, upon hearing the name of the Buddha Amitabha, keeps His Name in mind **with undisturbed thoughts**, as if for one day, for two days, for three days, for four days, for five days, for six days, for seven days, that person, when about to die, will see Buddha Amitabha and His Holy Retinue to appear before him/her. When that person dies, **having one’s mind without inversion**, one can then be reborn into the Sukhavati Pure Land of Buddha Amitabha....”

The conditions of “keeping His Name in mind **with undisturbed thoughts, having one’s mind without inversion**” are all great emphases on the intensity of one’s “**mental strength**”. In keeping the Holy Name in one’s mind is a way to help maintain the **concentration and direction** of one’s “**mental strength**”. Being recalcitrant, some people might think that the “chanting of Holy Names” is more important than the intensity of “**mental strength**”. In fact, which method is more important in one’s Dharma practice, either one’s “**mental strength**”, or one’s “**sound**” of calling for the rescue? How about have a look at the following discussions, and then one would be much clearer about what are **the true teachings of the Buddhas**?

An article on the “**Research and Discussions on the Sutras of the Pure Land School**” (which was authored by Mr. Wen Jin Ke, and published in the “Modern Pure Land” Forum of Taiwan) had the

following discussions:

“According to a popular translation of the **“Larger Sutra of Immeasurable Life”** (《佛說無量壽經》 or the **“Greater Sukhavati-vyuha-sutra”**) by Sanghavarman (an Indian monk who came to China during the Wei Cao Dynasty), the Eighteenth Vow of Buddha Amitabha, which was His Fundamental Intentional Vow, reads as follows: ‘If, when I attain Buddhahood, the sentient beings of the ten quarters who, after having heard my name and thus awakened their highest faith and aspiration of rebirth in that country of mine, even they have recollected such a ‘thought’ (‘nian’念) for only ten times. If they could not be born there, may I not attain perfect enlightenment, with the exception of those who have committed the ‘five deadly sins’ (Anantarya), and those who have blasphemed the ‘authentic Buddhist teachings’ (Dharma).’ This “ten times of nian”, if to be explained strictly in accordance to the contexts (to discourse the sutra in the way of righteous Buddhist teachings, and elaborate the meanings according to the sutra), is referring to the “generation of the thought on the ‘aspiration of rebirth in that country of mine’ for ten times”, and not referring to the “chanting of the Holy Name of Buddha Amitabha” for ten times”.

However, Master Shan Dao had apparently interpreted this phrase on the “ten times of ‘nian’” in the scripture to be referring to as the “chanting of the Buddha’s Holy Name for ten times”. In his **“The Knacks of Contemplation and Conceptualization”**, Master Shan Dao had directly rewritten this part of the Sutra as follows: ‘If I have attained Buddhahood, the sentient beings of the ten quarters who, after having heard my name and thus awakened their highest faith and aspiration of rebirth in that country of mine, they should call my name for a minimum of ten times. With the strength of my vow, if they could not be born there, may I not attain perfect enlightenment’. In his **“Praises on Rebirths”**, it had also altered the words as follows: ‘If I have attained Buddhahood, the sentient beings of the ten quarters, call my name for a minimum of ten times. If they could not be born there, may I not attain perfect enlightenment’.....

In order to reveal the true and original meanings of the scripture, so as to avert the ambiguities in the Chinese texts, we can read

these through the original Sanskrit texts, or their translations in different languages. Friedrich Max Mueller (A.D. 1823–1900), the first Professor of Comparative Theology at Oxford University, had directly translated the **“Greater Sukhavati-vyuha-sutra”** from Sanskrit into English. The corresponding statements of the Chinese text on the Eighteenth Vow of Buddha Amitabha were translated as follows:

“O Bhagavat, if those beings who in immeasurable and innumerable Buddha countries, after they have heard my name, when I shall have obtained Bodhi, should direct their thought to be born in that Buddha country of mine, and should for that purpose bring their stock of merit to maturity, if these should not be born in that Buddha country, even those who have only ten times repeated the thought of that Buddha country, barring always those beings who have committed the five deadly sins, and who have caused an obstruction and abuse of the good Law, then may I not obtain the highest perfect knowledge.” (From **“Studies in Buddhism”**, 1888.)

For further elaborations on the Sanskrit words of “up to ten ‘nian’”, Kotatsu Fujita, a Japanese scholar of Buddhism had made some explanations in his article **“The Central Issues on the Practices of the Pure Land Buddhism”**. We shall quote two paragraphs from his work, with the first paragraph as follows:

The original Sanskrit word for the Chinese word of “nian” in the “ten times of ‘nian’” was “mind” (“citta” in Sanskrit). In the **“Greater Sukhavati-vyuha-sutra”**, the phrase “up to ten times of ‘nian’” of the Eighteenth Vow in Sanskrit is “antaso dasabhis cittopada-parivartan”, which basically means that “even though with this on the generation of ten ‘nian’”..... According to the Chinese translation of the **“Greater Sukhavati-vyuha-sutra”**, “up to ten ‘nian’” is similar to the Sanskrit’s equivalent of “even though ten times of mind are generated” (“dasacittopadat” in Sanskrit). Special attention should be paid in the Chinese translation of the **“Greater Sukhavati-vyuha-sutra”** that “up to one ‘nian’” corresponds directly to the Sanskrit phrase of “even though one thought is generated” (“antasaekacittotpadenapi” in Sanskrit), in which both usages were almost identical.

In the second paragraph, Kotatsu Fujita mentioned the following: “Just to add one more explanation. This saying of ‘one time of **nian**’, in the Pure Land Buddhism of both China and Japan, is widely known to be understood as **the chanting of the Holy Name of the Buddha**. This can be perceived to be an explanation that had only appeared in later years. Looking back from now, one can be almost certain that this is the determined case”.

Basing upon the two paragraphs of Mr. Kotatsu Fujita, a further elaboration results: in the **original Sanskrit text, it literally does not have any meanings of “chanting”**. That was why Kotatsu Fujita had pointed out the fact that, in both China and Japan, the “Pure Land School” has interpreted this **one** time of ‘**nian**’ as **one** time of ‘**chanting**’, which was an “explanation that had occurred in later years”. In other words, **this was not the original meaning of the Sutra itself**, and thus Kotatsu Fujita had deemed it that “one can be almost certain that this is the determined case”, after having compared the Chinese text with the original Sanskrit text.”

Please note that the word ‘**citta**’ in Sanskrit was translated into Chinese as ‘**mind**’, while the word ‘**smṛti**’ in Sanskrit was translated into Chinese as ‘**nian**’ (**its actual meaning is “thought”**). The Sanskrit word of ‘**smṛti**’ corresponds to the Pali word of ‘**saṁti**’. The Chinese translation of the word ‘**nian**’ is referring to the **“keeping of the external objects being contemplated or visualized clearly in mind and not to forget”**. It was explained as ‘the ability of clearly retaining (**the images**) in mind’ in Volume One of the **“Abhidharmaprakaraṇa-sāstra”**; while in Volume Four of the **“Abhidharmakośaśāstra”**, it was explained as the ‘retaining of the images of objects clearly and not to forget’.

Thus, the so-called “deep concentration (**samādhi**) in the ‘**nian**’ of the Buddha” refers to **“clearly retain and not to forget the image of the Buddha, with a ‘focused mental strength’ to enter into deep concentration (samādhi)”**. Hence, “**nian**” is one kind of “mental strength”, and it plays **an utterly important role** on the path of Dharma practice. If one has altered the using of one’s “mental strength” during ‘**nian**’ to just the act of oral “chanting”, then the meanings behind it would be **totally distorted**. If one is merely orally chanting the Holy Names of the Buddhas or mantras but without the “contemplation and visualization” part of ‘**nian**’, the case in point would then be the same as “the chanting of mantras by a parrot”. “What is left behind is merely the form,

but without the real contents”, and so it is **most difficult to induce** the gigantic potential energy of one’s “mental strength”.

On the other hand, if the oral chanting of the Holy Names of the Buddhas or mantras is done in conjunction with the ‘**nian**’ (**the thought**) of “contemplation and visualization”, then this oral chanting of the Holy Names of the Buddhas or mantras would become a kind of “auxiliary force” in enhancing a **more concentrated** “contemplation and visualization”. Therefore, ‘**nian**’ (**the thought**) of “contemplation and visualization” is the **“main force”**, which can **directly** help to further induce the gigantic potential energy of the **“nature of mind”** (**“cittatā” in Sanskrit**). As the oral chanting of the Holy Names of the Buddhas or mantras is only a kind of “auxiliary force”, and so it could merely **indirectly** help and support one’s “mental strength”.

There is a huge difference, with a vast distance, between the two. Therefore, this kind of wrong interpretations on the revelations by the Buddha brought about a great shift on the **core of Dharma practice** from having the “mental strength” as the crux of the matter to having the “oral chanting” as the crux of the matter. In doing so, it is like the alteration of one’s driving on a **straightforward superhighway**, to that of driving on a rugged and winding road with twists and turns, towards the destination of “success”. It had been astray from the real principle of Mother Nature: that is, the **“oral-pith instruction” of “Everything comes from the mind, and so all things can be resolved by the mind”**.

According to the above-mentioned discourses, it has clearly illustrated that many sentient beings had been misled by these **wrongly “misguided-interpretations”**, such that for over a thousand years or so, **the methods of Dharma practice** had gone astray, **deviated and misplaced in both the crux of the matter and its direction**. All the Buddhas have required all sentient beings to **exert their efforts on the training of their “mental strengths”**, and not on the “sounds”. The “sounds” can only be an “auxiliary force” to help support the “mental strength” in terms of its focus and direction. It is uncertain that this sort of misleading was intentional or unintentional. If it was intentional, the motivation behind this might be that: if by just asking all those sentient beings, who aspire to be reborn into the Pure Land, a very simple requirement on chanting a few words of the Buddha’s Holy Name, then would one be most likely and glad to do it? If the answer to this question is yes, then why not? The simpler the teachings, the easier will it be for its propagation.

Hence, Master Shan Dao had altered the texts of the **“Sutra”** from “up to ten times of ‘**nian**’ (**the thought**)” to **“they should call my name for a minimum of ten times,**

with the strength of my vow". In this way, it had changed the method of contemplation and visualization by the 'nian' (the thought) of one's mind, to the method of "oral chanting" by the using of one's mouth instead. Even if this was unintentional, this had caused many Dharma practitioners throughout the ages to have wrongly misplaced their core of Dharma practice to the "sounds" while neglecting one's "mental strength". It had thus totally altered the original intentions by all the Buddhas, as well as on the real principle of one's resolution for quandary.

Due to the fact that those propagators only talked a lot about the benefits of the "Pure Land", but did not put any emphasis on those "precepts" ("silas" in Sanskrit) (such as "committing of suicide is a great sin of transgression", etc.) as complementary to each other during its propagation, neither did they impose with equal emphasis on the three studies of "precepts, meditation, and wisdom" during their propagations, and so an imbalance occurred during their propagations which eventually led to a great many "suicidal cases". Why are the propagators only keen to defend the interests of their own religious sect, and not on the real interest and benefits of all sentient beings? Probably a lot of propagators do not even know that the core of Dharma practice is on one's "mental strength". It might also be the fact that there are only very few propagators who are willing to "stand up" and speak out the truth, while most would prefer to "avoid having troubles". Even up till nowadays, there are still some people who suggest to others on the internet by saying that a person who had committed suicide can also "be reborn into the Pure Land".

An extremely absurd paragraph of misleading "wrong view" is quoted here as follows: "Master so and so had said, 'If a person keeps on chanting the Buddha's Holy Name for seven consecutive days, and then immediately commit suicide, one could also be reborn into the Pure Land of the West.'" This is such an example of all those absurd Buddhist propagators who, while do not understand the rules of Mother Nature but only fond of superficial explanations on the wordings of the "Sutras" without any profound analysis on the three studies of 'precepts, meditation and wisdom', have tried to promote their so-called religious doctrines by using superstitions to their very extremes.

In fact, someone had refuted their sayings by asking: "Suicide is a great sin of transgression, and so how could one ever be able to be reborn into the Pure Land?" Surprisingly, this group of people made the following reply: "According to the Vow of Amitabha Bhagavat,

only those who had committed the "five deadly sins" (Anantarya), and those who have blasphemed the 'authentic Buddhist teachings' (Dharma), would not be able to be reborn into the Pure Land of the West.... Even if a person has transgressed on the 'Five Precepts' during this life, so long as he/she has not transgressed to the commitments of the "five deadly sins", or has not blasphemed the 'authentic Buddhist teachings', and if he/she focuses one's mind on the chanting of the Buddha's Holy Name as according to the Vow of Amitabha Bhagavat, then Amitabha Bhagavat would come to fetch him/her as according to His own vow." (The "five deadly sins" are: parricide, matricide, killing an Arhat, destroying the harmony of the Sangha, and shedding the blood of a Buddha. The "Five Precepts" are: refrains from killing, stealing, adultery, lying, and intoxicating liquors).

Then, some other person had further refuted on such kind of reply by saying: "Buddhism is a religion which strictly prohibits the act of killing. All sentient beings are considered to possess the "Buddhata" (that is, the nature of "Buddhahood") and will thus attain Buddhahood in the future. Hence, they should be provided with offerings and services as if as to one's own parents, and so how could one be so hard-hearted as to kill them? The killing of a sentient being is the same as the killing of a "Buddha-to-be" (that is, the "committing of suicide" is equivalent to the "killing of a Buddha", and so it is a great transgression of the "five deadly sins", and thus there is no way that one can be reborn into the Pure Land)..... It is also mentioned in the "Brahmajala-sutra" that all sentient beings are our fathers and mothers, and so the act of





killing of sentient beings is equivalent to that of “parricide and matricide”. In this regard, suicide is an act that is no different from that of “parricide and matricide” (that is, the act of “committing suicide” is equivalent to that of “parricide and matricide”, and is a transgression of the “five deadly sins”. Hence, there is no way that the transgressor could be “reborn into the Pure Land”). Furthermore, the “Mahaprajnaparamita-sastra” also mentioned that: if a person did not adhere to the precept of “no-killing”, then it will simply lose its meaning regardless of how hard one has practiced for the accumulation of merits.”

In fact, “Vajrayana” practitioners should have a much clearer view and be able to distinguish the rights from the wrongs. Due to the fact that “Vajrayana” practitioners should have to visualize oneself as a “deity” (that is, a Buddha), and so the act of “committing suicide” is equivalent to that of the “murdering of the deity”, which is the “killing of a Buddha”. Regardless of the fact that there is no such recognition of “oneself as a Buddha” in the practices of the other Buddhist sects, there is no doubt that the Lord Buddha Shakyamuni had personally proclaimed that all sentient beings possess the “Buddhata” (that is, the nature of “Buddhahood”). As such, this element inserted in the practices of “Vajrayana” on ascertaining “oneself as a Buddha” serves, not only for the enhancement of one’s “mental strength”, but also as an important cognitive approach in forging a good foundation for the “right knowledge and right view” on the non-differentiated aspects of “mind, Buddha and sentient

beings”, in order to enable oneself to merge into the “bhutatahata” (the non-differentiated “Dharmata”). This is, indeed, one of the oral-pith instructions for the realization of “Emptiness” (“shunyata”), and thus shows that the Dharma practices of “Vajrayana” are full of wisdom.

Perhaps, someone might ask such a question: It was stated in the “Smaller Sukhavati-vyuha-sutra” that: sentient beings are required to be able, from the first day to the seventh day, to have one-pointed concentration “with undisturbed thoughts”, as well as “having one’s mind without inversion” before they can be reborn into the Pure Land. However, it was also mentioned in the “Greater Sukhavati-vyuha-sutra” that: so long as a person would repeat ten times the thought of “being reborn into Buddha Amitabha’s country”, one could then be able to achieve it. Why it seems that there is a contradiction between these two “Sutras”?

The “Smaller Sukhavati-vyuha-sutra” has revealed the right and effective method of Dharma practice for one’s “rebirth into the Pure Land”, and also indicates that, only if a person does not “commit any transgressions of the precepts”, one’s odds of success are extremely high indeed. Moreover, as the Dharma practitioner’s “mental strength” is adequately strong, one does not have to be kept inside a lotus for further upgrading after being “reborn into the Pure Land”, but instead one can directly move around freely within the “Pure Land” and receive further teachings from the Buddha in person in order to continue on with one’s Dharma practice. As for those “transgressors of precepts” or their “mental strengths” are not adequately strong and pure, they will need to be kept inside the lotuses for further upgrading practices, with the longest period to be kept for twelve great “kalpas”. (“Kalpa” refers to a period of time. A small “kalpa” is equal to the time required for a universe to go through the cycle of ‘formation, existence, deterioration and annihilation’. Twenty small “kalpas” is equal to a middle “kalpa”, and four middle “kalpass” is equal to a great “kalpa”).

As for the Eighteenth Vow, of the “Buddha Amitabha’s Forty-eight Vows” as expounded in the “Greater Sukhavati-vyuha-sutra”, it has suggested that each of the individuals only needs to repeat ten times the thought of “being reborn into Buddha Amitabha’s country”, one could then be able to be reborn into the Pure Land. However, it did not specify in the text that this should be done at the “moment of death”, and so the implication is that it is not an instruction for emergency. As such, it could not be applied at the “turning point” of the moment of death to capitalize on for the proper conditions of one’s rebirth. In this regard, this part of the text was purely a “Prayer

of Aspiration” by Buddha Amitabha before his attainment of Buddhahood.

As according to the revelations in the **“Tibetan Book of the Dead”**: when the “spiritual body” departs from the “physical body” through the “entrance doors of life and death” after one’s death, the deceased person would be able to see the “light”, and this is the way to capitalize on for the proper conditions of one’s rebirth. (Please refer to the articles on “The Meaning of Near-Death Experiences” in Issues 3 and 4 of the “Lake of Lotus”).

The appearance of the “light” at this very moment is owing to the complete cessation of all the negative emotions and energies which are bothering people’s minds. There are altogether 80 such kinds, and are categorized under the three poisons of “greed, hatred and ignorance”. This everlasting natural ability, which has been primordially possessed by all sentient beings, could thus be fully revealed. In Buddhism, this is known as the “intrinsic nature”, the “Buddhata”, or the “primordial nature”. At this moment, “whatever comes to the mind, it would appear accordingly”. However, those people who have not been trained on one’s “mental strength” (including “shunyata”) would have no way in trying to retain such a condition.

Therefore, in the **“Greater Sukhavati-vyuha-sutra”**, it contains admonitions to all sentient beings by asking them to make “contemplation and visualization” unceasingly on the Buddhas and the Pure Land at the moment of death, and even from the first day to the seventh day consecutively. This is the application of one’s own “mental strength”, in conjunction with the manifestation of one’s “intrinsic nature” at that very moment, in order to be reborn into the Pure Land. Thus, the admonitions and teachings in the **“Smaller Sukhavati-vyuha-sutra”** are absolutely correct, and conform to the rules of Mother Nature. There are no elements of superstition at all!

The “Buddha Amitabha’s Forty-eight Vows” in the **“Greater Sukhavati-vyuha-sutra”** are the different kinds of aspirations, as they do not necessarily conform to the actual conditions, and so it is hard to predict the time required for each individual to have success. After all, “karmic forces are inconceivable”. (Please refer to the DVD on the “Inconceivable Law of Karma”, published by Dharma Buddhist Association). Even with the limitless power of the Buddha, He could not change the retributions of “collective karma”, and could only gradually influence the “minds” of sentient beings so as to induce upon the potentials within the “nature of their minds”. (“Cittata” in Sanskrit, also known as the “Buddhata”, or “intrinsic nature”, which means the most impeccably clear nature of the original awareness possessed primordially by all

sentient beings. Please refer to the articles on “The Meaning of Near-death Experiences” in Issues 4 and 5 of the “Lake of Lotus”.)

Buddha Amitabha had attained the “perfect enlightenment”, which is the “attainment of Buddhahood”. Under whatever circumstances, He would not retrogress to the extent of not “attaining perfect enlightenment”. Even in case that there may be a situation in which a sentient being who had repeated ten times the thought of “being reborn into Buddha Amitabha’s country”, but then Buddha Amitabha had not received this message such that He was not able to punctually help this sentient being to be reborn into the Pure Land, yet it is just a matter of time. At the right moment, the being’s sincere wish and aspiration would be materialized.

Everybody, including every Buddha and Bodhisattva, would have their own wishes and aspirations. Although the wish may not be materialized within an instant, but as long as one’s “willful power” does not cease, the day of success must surely come. Thus, all the Buddhas and Bodhisattva had given us an obvious hint: regardless of what kinds of wishes that either the sentient beings, or even the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas themselves, have, the success of which could only be materialized if one’s “mental strength” can be in force ceaselessly. Hence, there is no contradiction at all between the **“Smaller Sukhavati-vyuha-sutra”** and the **“Greater Sukhavati-vyuha-sutra”**. The guidance in the **“Smaller Sukhavati-vyuha-sutra”** is, indeed, a kind of teaching which could lead to an instant or quick occurrence of one’s success. On the other hand, the Eighteenth Vow of Buddha Amitabha in the **“Greater Sukhavati-vyuha-sutra”** is an aspiration, and not a teaching. Furthermore, the day of success is yet “uncertain” or “to be certain”.

The Using of Dharma Practice to Enter into “Near-Death Experiences”

Many Dharma practitioners do not have the slightest clue as to the key of Dharma practice, which should be on the training of one’s “mental strength”. They would have thought that the best method of one’s Dharma practice is the one which will enable oneself to see the “Pure Land” or the “Buddhas and Bodhisattvas” while still alive. Moreover, they would further believe that, if one can see the “Pure Land” or the “Buddhas and Bodhisattvas” at the moment of death, it will definitely be a strong evidence for one to “be reborn into the Pure Land”. As such, they will be going around in circles on a wrong route, and may even lose their lives for no reason.

Professor Yamaori Tetsuo, at the International Centre

of Cultural Research in Japan, had mentioned some cases of the Japanese Dharma practitioners during the Middle Ages. In order to **have personal experiences on the visions of the “Pure Land” or the “Buddhas and Bodhisattvas”, they had practiced the method of fasting and died as a result of that.** He had personally tried out on this fasting method in order to experience the feelings of death and dying, and had also written some articles on the “Near-Death Experiences” (NDEs).

At one point in time, Professor Yamaori Tetsuo vomited blood due to the recurrence of duodenal ulcer, and he was thus hospitalized for treatments. During the period of treatments, he was compelled to fast for about ten days. For the first three to four days, he suffered a lot of pains due to hunger. But then, by the fifth or sixth day, **his “consciousness” started to become much clearer, as it was free from the binding and interference of the “physical body”, due to its own physical weakness, while his hearing and smelling abilities also changed to become very sensitive.** As a whole, all the five sensations of the five sense organs became very sharp. Basing upon this evidence, we can know for sure, from the experiences of the NDE survivors and those who have just passed away, that they all truly felt traumatic pains for even just a slight touch on the body, as it is true that the five sensations of their bodies are most sensitive at that period of time. (Please refer to the articles on “The Meaning of Near-death Experiences” in Issues 8 and 20 of the “Lake of Lotus”.)

According to the records in the **“Stories of Rebirths”**, there had been Dharma practitioners who, either known or anonymous, had dwelt in the parts in Hieizan and Kouyasan of Japan during the periods of late Heian to the Middle Ages, in order to practice on their methods for rebirths. Having been fasting for quite a while, they had achieved their wishful objective to be able to visualize the “Buddhas and Bodhisattvas” in coming to fetch for them during “the scenes at the moment of death”. These Dharma practitioners started to stroll along the mountain trails, while carrying out their Dharma practices. Once they had sensed that the final moment was nearing them, they would start changing their modes of Dharma practice.

Firstly, these Dharma practitioners would start to practice the “bark meal”, that is, to live only on the barks of trees. They would abandon the eating of the five kinds of grains and cereals, and would only eat the fruits from the trees, or tree roots, or grass roots, etc. as meals. When their nutritional levels went down gradually, their bodies became as weak as a wilted trunk, whereupon they would formally enter into the stage of fasting, and would eat nothing at all. Some of these Dharma practitioners would even continue

their practices without either rest or sleep, so that **their physical bodies would quickly become extremely frail, as if approaching the state of a corpse.**

By this time, incredible situations occurred. Around one week to ten days after the fasting, these Dharma practitioners would definitely encounter some kind of so-called supernatural phenomena. For instance, some of them would see the Buddha Amitabha coming to fetch for them, or to touch upon their cranium which symbolized that they had been granted the right to be “reborn into the Pure Land”. Usually, having seen such supernatural phenomena, a Dharma practitioner would then pass away the day after. These Dharma practitioners might take this fasting only occasionally, but would start this fasting to death once they had confirmed their final moments. As a matter of fact, **this sort of phenomena or the atmosphere of their Dharma practice, to a very large extent, was rather superstitious and misleading. Hence, one should be extremely cautious!**

Actually, this so-called “sensing the approach of death”, or in “foreknowing the final moment” is very subjective in nature. In fact, there were quite many cases of “sensing the approach of death”, but then they all turned out to be just like **a joke.** Basing on



one's subjective cognition of "sensing" the moment of death, and then started to take the act of "committing suicide" (even though it was a slow and gradual process) is, in fact, an act on the "transgression of precepts", then how would it be possible to have the "Buddhas and Bodhisattvas" to appreciate this act and then come to fetch for them? The occurrence of such kind of so-called supernatural phenomena was actually the subjective wishful thinking of those Dharma practitioners, which were formed by the projections of their "mental strengths". When their bodies rapidly became extremely frail, and approached the state of a corpse, the "endorphins inside the brain" would then be released, and so the Dharma practitioners would feel that "everything would turn out as they had wished for". (Please refer to the article on "The Meaning of Near-death Experiences" in the Issue 21 of the "Lake of Lotus".)

The release of "endorphins inside the brain" indicates that death is impending, and the "mind" of the dying person would become much clearer, which was more popularly known as the "flashback", in which one's past experiences and memories seem to have come back. People who had experienced this kind of so-called supernatural phenomenon would most likely to have formally passed away the next day. Because of the fact that these Dharma practitioners had mistakenly taken these "illusions" as a "symbol of success", of which these episodes were then recorded down for the future generations, and as a result, this has made many more Dharma practitioners to neglect the proper trainings on "mental strength" and to learn the correct knowledge about the "posthumous world". Instead, they only chased after the so-called auspicious phenomena at the moment of death, by trying to give strained interpretations and drew far-fetched analogies about them. In this way, it only deepens the superstitions without elevating one's ability of "awareness".

The Dharma practitioners of the "Pure Land School" pay special attention and importance to the responses on the chanting of the Buddha's Holy Name, as well as the so-called auspicious phenomena at the moment of death, and to make great propagations about them. Hence, many supernatural episodes were widely prevalently, and were recorded and made available in the biographies of all those who were supposed to be reborn into the Pure Land. Master Che Wu, the Twelfth Patriarch of the "Pure Land School" had said: "For those Dharma practitioners of the 'Pure Land Sect', there are eight things that are 'worthy of our great and utter elaborations'. Among which, the eighth one was 'to make use of the various supernatural auspicious phenomena as evidences of rebirths (to the Pure Land)'. (According to the "Quotations of Chan Master Che Wu", in Volume 14, Book 4

(Second Edition) of the "Supplementary Canon of Sutras".)

In the "Hidden Routes in the Paths" by Zhang Shi Cheng of the Qing Dynasty, it also specially listed out the "knacks of verification" (According to the "Quotations of Chan Master Che Wu", in Volume 14, Book 4 (Second Edition) of the "Supplementary Canon of Sutras"), and was totally dedicated to narrating the supernatural auspicious cases at the moment of death for the Dharma practitioners of the "Pure Land School". The propagations of such kind of supernatural auspicious cases at the moment of death had a misleading element to it because those propagators did not mention anything about the effects of the "endorphins inside the brain". Furthermore, such kind of propagation would make the dying person to have over-estimated one's own ability, or to have over-relied upon the superstitions of such encountered scenes by neglecting one's own "mental strength". These are the origins of the many tragedies occurred.

Besides the "committing of suicide", there were many scary ways and practices of religions for the sake of acquiring such kind of supernatural auspicious phenomena. For example, Hindu ascetic practitioners took sitting postures of meditation in mountains without moving for a few years. Some carried out fasting, and sat on debris of glass; others hung heavy weights from long needles which were pierced throughout their bodies; while some others maintained an upside-down position for several years. In some other religions, such ascetic behaviors as the slashing of oneself had been recorded as a kind of ascetic practice. When an ascetic act brings the physical body to an unbearable level of extreme pains, "endorphins inside the brain" would then be released, and the pains would be turned into pleasant sensations, and in a trance that the person would feel that "everything would turn out as one wishes". This is, to many religious practitioners, exactly what they have aspired for."

The training of one's "mental strength" and "mental concentration" could assist a Dharma practitioner to gain more assurance to be reborn into the "Pure Land" and in meeting the "Buddhas and Bodhisattvas", either while one is still alive or after one's death. Moreover, one's "awareness" of an "enlightened mind" could be further elevated and uplifted to higher levels of spirituality. There is no doubt about this! The crux of one's success or failure lies on: whether there is training on one's "mental strength" and "mental concentration"; and whether the formulae included (in the training) are correct and up-to-the-point? Rather than merely basing upon the superficial appearance of the so-called auspicious signs, or some of the self

narrations of those dying people at their moments of death. As according to the revelations in the **“Tibetan Book of the Dead”** of “Tibetan Buddhism”, as well as in lot of feedbacks from the experiences of those “near-death” survivors, there is still a long distance for one to go in the “posthumous world”. As such, **either success or failure in reaching one’s destination does not depend on the so-called good or bad signs of those “scenes at the moment of death”**. This was also mentioned in the **“Sutra of Ksitigarbha Bodhisattva’s Fundamental Vows”**.

The Knack of Pure Land in Vajrayana

In the Dharma practices of “Vajrayana”, there are also teachings on the rebirths into the “Pure Land of Buddha Amitabha”. Owing to the fact that there is no formula on the **practice of “Emptiness”** in the prevalent ritual texts (**“Sadhanas”**) of the “Buddha Amitabha’s Pure Land”, and so the teaching is merely a practice on the **“Generation Stage”** (the **“Generation Stage”** is the kind of practice that is mainly on the **contemplation and visualization of the “deity”**), and since this is not a practice on the **“Perfection Stage”** (The **“Perfection Stage”** is a more practical training on **“Emptiness”**. This level of practice does not rely upon the blessings of the “deity”, but must have the training on the intensity of “mental concentration”. If the intensity of “mental concentration” is adequate, in conjoining with the practical training on “Emptiness”, one can attain “Buddhahood” upon one’s death at the fastest level, which is known as the **“attainment of Buddhahood in this very lifetime”**), and so it is not feasible for the Dharma practitioners to be disengaged from the “tractional forces” within this “cycle of karmic existence” (**“Samsara”**). Hence, they could only **continue on with their Dharma practices** in the “Pure Land”, where they are being safe-guarded by the “Buddhas and Bodhisattvas”, until they are able to disengage themselves from the “tractional forces” within this “cycle of karmic existence” (**“Samsara”**) by their own efforts; or even to be able to “attain Buddhahood”.

The teachings on the “Buddha Amitabha’s Pure Land” in “Vajrayana” are **similar to the “Methods on the Five Kinds of Nian” of the Knack of Pure Land**, and there is **no significant difference**. However, the contemporary propagators of the “Pure Land School” **only emphasize** on the **oral chanting** of the Buddha’s Holy Name, while neglecting the importance of “contemplation and visualization” in the teachings to their followers. In this way, the **gravity and crux** of both Dharma practice and its propagation **has been wrongly placed**, and so very few people know that the “Methods on the Five Kinds of Nian” is the real training on one’s “mental strength”. It is, indeed, a real pity of **“discarding a pearl in a**

dusty corner, while raising a green stone up to sky high!” Contemporary Dharma propagators should really have to **think it over twice** as to **whether this is a great problem to lower the quality** of Buddhism to that level of “human and heavenly beings”?

According to the **“Greater Sukhavati-vyuha-sutra”**, the “Methods on the Five Kinds of Nian” refers to:

1. **Knack of Worship** – worship with the highest respect, and make a strong wish to be reborn into the Pure Land;
2. **Knack of Praise & Admiration** – in praising for admiration on the great merits of the Pure Land and all the Buddha;
3. **Knack of Prayer** – make a wish to practice for **“calm-abiding”** (**“Samatha”**) for the purification of one’s mental karmas; that is, to cease the commitments of all impure karmas in one’s mind for one’s rebirth into the Pure Land.
4. **Knack of Observation** – make a wish to practice for **“penetrative-insight”** (**“Vipasyana”**) with the following contents: (1) the merits and solemnities (**semblance**) of “Buddha Amitabha’s Pure Land” (**that particular Pure Land**); (2) the merits and solemnities (**appearance**) of Buddha Amitabha (**that particular Buddha**); (3) The merits and solemnities (**appearances**) of the Bodhisattvas in “Buddha Amitabha’s Pure Land”;
5. **Knack of Dedication** – contemplate on the sufferings of all sentient beings, and so dedicate all of one’s own merits to all sentient beings, for the benefits of both oneself and others, and praying that all would ultimately “attain Buddhahood”.

The **“Method on the Transference of Consciousness”** in “Vajrayana”, known as **“Phowa”**, is also one of the Dharma practices in taking “Buddha Amitabha’s Pure Land” as one’s destination for rebirth. **This Dharma practice is a more direct application of one’s own “mental strength” to proceed directly into the “Pure Land”, without the necessity of waiting for the “Buddhas and Bodhisattvas” to come and fetch for oneself, which is a much more assured way of Dharma practice**. Of course, there are certainly other Dharma practices that are **even “more straightforward”** in achieving higher targets – that is, in disengaging oneself from “Samsara”, or in attaining “Buddhahood”. For example, the shortcuts that were mentioned in the **“Tibetan Book of the Dead”** in “Vajrayana”, when conjoins with the teachings of the **“One Hundred Peaceful and Wrathful Deities of Bardo”** of the Nyingma School of Tibetan Buddhism, would become the **most “up-to-the point” teachings of all “shortcuts”**. (Please refer to the introduction on the **“One Hundred**

Peaceful and Wrathful Deities of the Bardo", on pages 42–44 in Issue 8 of the "Lake of Lotus") (To be continued)

(Remark: "The Meaning of Near-Death Experiences" was published, and included the articles on "The Meaning of Near-Death Experiences" from Issue 1 to Issue 10.)



Second Patriarch of "Pure Land School" : Master Shan Dao

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The Application of Wisdom



The Wisdom in Directing One's Dharma Practice (22)



By Vajra Acharya Pema Lhadren
Translated by Amy W.F. Chow

Excerpt of Last Issue The Skills in the Setting-up of “Plans”

The primary condition for “success” is the setting-up of an “objective” (please refer to Issue 2 of the “Lake of Lotus”). In the setting-up of an objective with regards to one’s preference, capability and ideal, to be supplemented with the skills in the setting-up of an “objective” (please refer to Issue 3 of the “Lake of Lotus”), a blueprint of grandeur for the ideal of one’s life has more or less been drawn up. Then, what is the next step to proceed in order to ensure success “in achieving the objective”?

The next step is to draw up a detailed and concrete “plan” which is also strategic and efficient in nature. To work out a series of “plans” for the major, medium-term and small objectives is like the building up of a network of interconnected highways which would eventually lead to “success”. In designing the numerous “plans”, attention must be paid to the following items:

1. **Complementarity and the Enhancement of Effectiveness:** The links between “plans” should have compatible, complementary and interdependent effects....(please refer to Issue 4 of the “Lake of Lotus”).
2. **A thorough elimination process to decide what to “adopt and abandon”:** Irrespective of working

out major, medium-term and small “plans”, there must be a process to prioritize and eliminate with regards to some designated elements and conditions. A thorough elimination process to determine what to “adopt and abandon”

Designated Elements & Conditions in Determining What to “Adopt and Abandon”

- (i) **Importance:** To what extent would the “plan” help in achieving the “objective”? To what extent would this “objective”, in which one is prepared to achieve, help in achieving the major objective”?..... (please refer to Issue 5 of the “Lake of Lotus”).
- (ii) **The Price to be Paid:** Life is short and limited. All the resources that you presently possess could be lost at any moment. One must clearly understand the characteristics of the “Combination of Resources” and its relations with Destiny in one’s own life before making any changes, to realize the price that one has to pay for the different “plans”, and then go through the processes of elimination and deployment in order to “adopt and abandon” in these

various “plans”. In this way, this would enable the limited resources to become “ever-renewing, inexhaustible and of unusual value for money” within a limited framework of time and space (please refer to Issue 6 of the “Lake of Lotus”).

(iii) **Strength and Weakness:** Every person has his/her own strengths, merits, skills, as well as his/her weaknesses and the Achilles’ heel (weakest point). In order to achieve success of any “objective” or of any “plan”, one must be very clear of one’s own strengths and weaknesses; and then through various skillful arrangements, try to complement and make use of one’s strengths and weaknesses in designing the contents and procedures of the “plans”. This is an “important strategy” in eliminating and deploying the “plans”, and thus should not be underestimated (please refer to Issue 7 of the “Lake of Lotus”).

(iv) **The Factors of Time and Effectiveness (1):** In drawing up any “plan”, one must take into account the “planning of time”. The “principles for the usages and wastages of time” must be clear, and have to be linked up with the effectiveness of the “plan”. Hence, time should be spent on those “plans” which are most effective and can bring the highest rate of return. One should prioritize one’s different “plans” according to the long or short durations of time used and their relative effectiveness. “Plans” that require one to put in a lot of time and effort, but with low rates of return and low effectiveness, should be scrapped. One should refine and improve one’s “plans” by making reference to the “principles for the usages and wastages of time”. This is a major direction in the selecting, eliminating and refining process of one’s “plans” (please refer to Issue 8 of the “Lake of Lotus”).

(v) **The Factors of Time and Effectiveness (2):** Due to the simple fact that one has only very limited time and energy in one’s lifetime, and if one’s own objective is either to be “liberated from the cycle of transmigration” (known as “Samsara” in Sanskrit), or to attain “full enlightenment” (“Buddhahood”) within this very life, then

your “planning of time” and the “principles for the usages and wastages of time” for this life will become one of the critical points in determining whether you would succeed or fail. Hence one must be very cautious and rational about this. If your objective is “to be reborn into the Buddha’s Pure Land” within this lifetime, then you would have had greater flexibility in the handling of your “planning of time” and the “principles for the usages and wastages of time”, but they still should not be neglected. Hence, what will be the most wise and effective way in the “planning of time” for one’s life while one is on the path for Dharma practice?.....(please refer to Issue 9 of the “Lake of Lotus”).

(vi) **The Factors of Time and Effectiveness (3):** Does it mean that if one is unable to undergo “long-term retreat”, one would not be able to achieve the “objective” to become “liberated from Samsara or in attaining Buddhahood within this lifetime”? If you want to know the answer, please answer the following three questions first and to know about the “three essential factors” in the application of Buddhist teaching in our “Daily Living” (please refer to Issue 10 of the “Lake of Lotus”).

(vii) **The Factors of Time and Effectiveness (4): Wrong “Planning of Time”:** It is no easy matter at all for one to be able to master the keys to success of “Dharma Practices” in one’s “daily living” in order to have achievements, as well as to be able to achieve the “objective” of becoming “liberated from Samsara or in attaining Buddhahood within this lifetime”. Even if one does possess the three best conditions (please refer to Issue 10 of the “Lake of Lotus”), it will still be unavoidable that one can fall prey and become lost again in this “tidal sea of sorrow in Samsara”, as one goes through this undulated waves of ever-changing life cycle. If one tries not to fall again, and instead wants to further consolidate upon one’s own foundation, one of the best methods is to merge one’s own “Dharma practices” into one’s “daily living” so as to ensure one’s mastering of the “Planning of Time”.

No matter in the setting of what kinds of

“plans”, one has to try and predict what would be the outcomes that would be brought upon you by this “plan”? What will be the side-effects and how many? One always hopes for the best but be prepared for the worst. Many a Dharma practitioners, when planning the times for their “Dharma practices”, will tend to **take care of one but then lose hold of the others**, making it more contradictory, and also more confusing, for one’s own “daily living”, and thus ending in the **loss of what to “adopt and abandon”**. (please refer to the Issue 11 of the “Lake of Lotus”).

(viii) The Factors of Time and Effectiveness (5): The “Planning of Time” in One’s “Daily Living” (1) -- Linking up by the Main Theme, and Getting Through the Sequences of Events: How can the “planning of time” in one’s “daily living” **be designed** so as to avoid the various wrong doings? How should we practice the “Holy Dharma” so as to make the “effectiveness of Dharma practices during meditation” be linked up and **steadily sustained** with that in “post-meditation daily living” so as to further it and let it become **fully “developed”**? If one wants the “success” to be speed up, how should it be planned so as to **remove those obstacles** that will hinder the “effectiveness”? How can the **sequence** of incidents to be traced out of those confusions, and the **key** positions to be found in solving the problems? How can a consensus be reached between one’s “cognitions” and “reality” so that the **“contradictions” can be resolved**? How can the **“devotion, pure state of mind and dedication”** of Dharma practices “during meditation” be linked up and be sustained with that in the “post-meditation daily living” with a **correct “state of mind”**?(please refer to the Issue 12 of the “Lake of Lotus”).

(ix) The Factors of Time and Effectiveness (6): The Skilful Usages of the “Main Theme” and the “Sequences of Events”: The “cardinal mentality” is the major key in deciding on all things, and so the **“planning of one’s Dharma practices”** in one’s “daily living” has to use the “cardinal mentality” as the “main theme” to link up the “static states of Dharma practices” with the “dynamic states of Dharma practices”, by connecting

their “common points” so as to get through the rigid dichotomy in one’s “planning of time,” and thus opening and tidying up the disordered “sequences of events” in order to synergize the contradictions of these two and to make them to become complementary to each other, while using the “cardinal mentality” as the basis all through. This is, indeed, the **“main points of planning”** for one’s Dharma practices in “daily living”. Yet, how one focuses on the “cardinal mentality” and the “planning of time” would become the **main key points for one’s “successes and/or failures”....** (please refer to the Issue 13 of the “Lake of Lotus”).

(x) The Factors of Time and Effectiveness (7): Flexibility in the Using of One’s “Mentality” for One’s Dharma Practice: While practicing the Dharma during the undulated waves of “daily living”, one can hardly sustain one’s “meditational power” and the **degree of the steadiness** of one’s “Dharma practice” by **relying solely on “Emptiness”**. In order to be able to continuously enhance and elevate one’s Dharma practice in “daily living”, one must have **to adopt “Emptiness” as the unchanging and everlasting “cardinal mentality”**. One further needs to flexibly make use of the “three main essential points” of one’s Dharma practice in “daily living” so as to **train one’s own “mind”** in addressing the problems of one’s “daily living”, as well as to transform one’s “emotions and feelings” in becoming the “driving force for one’s Dharma practice” (please refer to the Issue 14 of the “Lake of Lotus”).



- (xi) The Factors of Time and Effectiveness (8): Criteria for “Dharma Practices in Times of Adversities” (1): In the undulated journey in the course of one’s lifetime, it is **unavoidable** that one would meet with many adversities. If you encounter these adversities and could not handle them properly, they would become the **obstacles** to all of your plans and objectives. Regardless of what “time and effectiveness” that you may have, they would be **completely** disturbed and delayed, and would hardly function properly. Thus, when one can skillfully adopt the strategy of getting through the obstacles by linking up the “Main Theme and the Sequences of Events”, and when one has set up the principles for **choosing** one’s “Cardinal Mentality” and also for the “Three Essential Factors” within one’s “mind”, one should at the same time follow the criteria for one’s “Dharma practices in times of adversities” as the **procedures for handling the situations** (please refer to the Issue 15 of the “Lake of Lotus”).
- (xii) The Factors of Time and Effectiveness (9): Criteria for “Dharma Practices in Times of Adversities” (2): Among the criteria for “Dharma Practices in times of Adversities”, one should pay attention and **adhere** to the following **procedures**: 1) to alienate from one’s role; 2) to remain calm; 3) to analyze accurately; 4) to act within one’s own capacities – this can be regarded as the “time planning for one’s Dharma practice during adversities”; 5) to take advantage of the different circumstances; 6) to learn from one’s own experiences; and 7) to elevate one’s own awareness, with particular reference to 3) to analyze accurately (please refer to the Issue 16 of the “Lake of Lotus”).
- (xiii) The Factors of Time and Effectiveness (10): Criteria for “Dharma Practices in Times of Adversities” (3): In times of favorable circumstances, it would be easy for one to achieve success regardless of what one does. One would **naturally** be successful without having to wait for the right opportunities, neither does one have to make any planning. This is because this will be the time for **the arrival of the “achieved rewards”**. The good deeds that you have accumulated in the past are the best planning for the “achieved rewards.” However, in times of adversities, no matter what one does, one would have encountered many obstacles and have one’s head badly battered. If one simply goes along naturally, it would lead one to a dead end. This is because, in times of adversities, it is the time **for the coming of one’s retributions due to one’s past bad deeds**. If one does not remain calm, wait for the right opportunity, and plan appropriately, it would be difficult for one to get out from the plight. The question, then, is **when will be the best time** to get out from the plight? And what would be considered as the **appropriate planning** (please refer to the Issue 17 of the “Lake of Lotus”)?
- (xiv) The Factors of Time and Effectiveness (11): Criteria for “Dharma Practices in Times of Adversities” (4) – Making use of the Circumstances: The characteristics for being in adversities are that one would be **beset with difficulties and will be unable to cope with the situations**. If one has to make use of the circumstances of that particular situation and time so as to break through the obstacles is basically an **extremely difficult matter to achieve**. Since it is **all that difficult**, the conditions that one would have to consider in order to complement the whole situation would be particularly even more so. There is an old Chinese saying that “Hero makes the trend of his time, and the trend of the time makes its own Hero”. After all, ‘the trend of the time and the environment’ together is one of the major elements for one’s success and failure. Hence, it is also **a necessary element** for one to get out from the plight by making use of the circumstances to break away from adversities. If one is to make use of the circumstances, one would adopt one of the following situations: (1) to **quietly wait** for the favourable circumstances to arise; (2) to **make use of** the existing circumstances; and (3) to **build up** favourable circumstances (please refer to the Issue 18 of the “Lake of Lotus”).
- (xv) The Factors of Time and Effectiveness (12): Criteria for “Dharma Practices in Times of Adversities”(5) -- Learn One’s Lessons from Past Experiences: Failure

is not necessarily a miserable thing. It can only be said as a blueprint which reflects on a series of **merits and weaknesses**. If one can learn one's lessons well from past experiences in finding out the "reasons for one's failures, as well as the **personal behavioral formulae** that led to such failures", one's "**wisdom of self-enhancement**" will be elevated by applying proper remedies to revise these **extremely concealed** and improper formulae, this would help to bring about one's success in the next occasion. During this process of "self-enhancement", it would enable one to live more happily and to have a direction, to have more meanings and values, and to be more proactive. In this way, what one would regard as failures have, in fact, now been changed into successes, and have brought about the essential elements for one's future successes. The "state of invincibility" is the most lonely and painful experience. Too many successes and for too long will only make one to lose one's sense of direction, and to easily lose oneself in one's own "ego". As such, one **would not be able to find out and revise the poor formulae**, and oneself would thus be easily bogged down in the mire of having too much "self-pride" and strong "arrogance" within one's own "ego", never being able **to see the real world in its totality**. In this



regard, such kind of continuous successes can only be said to be **an extremely big failure** (please refer to the Issue 19 of the "Lake of Lotus").

- (xvi) **The Factors of Time and Effectiveness (13): Criteria for "Dharma Practices in Times of Adversities" (6) – Enhancing One's Awareness:** Many a times the formation of one's mistakes and failures are due to the inadequacy of one's own "awareness". The biggest drawback was one's own failure lied in not "being aware" of what and where had gone wrong in one's own "behavioral formulae". This would result in one's repeating, or even expanding, of one's mistakes and failures endlessly. Being faulty or carelessness for a short while is not the main cause for one's mistakes and failures. **The main and real cause is the existence of deviations and defects in both the consciousness and the subconscious of one's own "behavioral formulae"**. This would lead to a chain of wrong behaviors, which would form **an orbit which would lead to further failures, and that one would find it hard to depart from it**. Along with this orbit of failures, it would further extend to many more faults and carelessness, and the end result would be more and greater failures. Hence, to "enhance one's awareness" is not only to elevate one's attentiveness, such that the frequency of one's making mistakes due to carelessness would be reduced, but the more important aspect is whether to have the ability for one's "self-reflection", for observing the minute details, and to carefully find out the deviations and defects in one's own "behavioral formulae" (please refer to the Issue 20 of the "Lake of Lotus").
- (xvii) **The Factors of Time and Effectiveness (14): Simplifying the Complexities, Finding the Keys -** Due to the fact that one's life span is **temporary and impermanent**, and so when one design and draw up a plan for one's own Dharma practice, one should need to include the "factor of time and effectiveness", all the more, as **the primary important point for one's consideration**. Apart from having the "right mindset and criteria" in handling periods of "adversities or prosperities" so that one

would be able to “master the factor of time” more accurately and to have **an edge, what other principles that one should need to pay attention to?** No matter what kinds of the “planning of time” that one has, they are bound to have both strengths and weaknesses. It is unavoidable that there will be some faults. However, the appropriate “planning of time” should be able to reduce or lighten all kinds of faults and be able to speed up the process in the showing of “success”. **An appropriate “planning of time” must make use of the following principles in its design:** 1. **Linking up by the Main theme, and getting through the sequences of events** – target: daily living before one’s death (please refer to [Issue 21 of Lake of Lotus](#)); 2. **Simplifying the complexities, finding the keys** – target: the wrestling ground of energies after one’s death; 3. **Differentiation on the order of importance, Proper handling of the interferences** –target: the wrestling ground of energies after one’s death (please refer to [Issue 21 of Lake of Lotus](#)).

(xvii) **The Factors of Time and Effectiveness (15):**

Mastering of Time and Choice of Methods

Irrespective of the objectives of one’s Dharma practice, one must choose the appropriate “methods of Dharma practice” that **correspond with one’s objectives**. The amount of **time spent** on these “methods of Dharma practice”, and the **effects that one can achieve** through them, are the **key and critical points** as to whether or not one can achieve the objectives, and so one should analyze them in more details. In order to have a quick and accurate way to analyze and measure the various “methods of Dharma practice”, one must first “bring out the chief points” on the “objectives” of the various practices, as well as the **effective elements** of the “methods of Dharma practice”, before one can correspondingly discuss and analyze the issues.

For the general populace, and even up to the great Dharma practitioners, their objectives of Dharma practice should be more or less of the following types:

1. **Praying for worldly desires** – For example: to seek for oneself and one’s own relatives to have “longevity, recovery from illness,

success in one’s career, good marriage, wealth increase, averting disasters and relief from sufferings, as well as reunion with those deceased loved ones”. Also, there are those who hope to get the “ease of heart and security at the present life”, etc.; or for “fame, wealth, respect” in order to study Buddhism; as well as for those who put in efforts to practice the Dharma.

2. **Rebirth in the good realms** – For example: to hope and pray for rebirth in the heavenly realm, or in the human realm, and not to fall into the evil realms (of animals, hungry ghosts and hells).
3. **Liberation from the tractions of the “cycle of karmic existence”** – to hope and pray for the **freedom** in deciding for oneself as to whether one would be reborn into the six realms (of heavens, asuras, humans, animals, hungry ghosts and hells), or whether to remain in the highest level of the “Realm of Form”, such as the “Akanistha” (the “Heaven at the End-of-Form-Realm”), which is beyond the control of the tractions. (Please refer to the explanations on the “Three Realms” in the article on the “Profound Abstruseness of Life and Death: The Meaning of Near-Death Experience” in Issue 17 of the “Lake of Lotus”).
4. **Attainment of Buddhahood** – The recovery of one’s “Primordial Nature” and the originally possessed and boundless capabilities, which are free from any bondages and to remain in the “Dharma Realm”. (The “Nature of the Mind”, also known as the “Buddha Nature”, or the “Primordial Nature”, refers to the **original possession** of that most crystal clarity of **awareness**. Please refer to the articles on “The Meaning of Near –Death Experience” in Issues 4 & 5 of the “Lake of Lotus”).

What are the methods that one can choose in order to achieve these four types of objectives? What will be their effects? What are the **critical key points** that one should pay attention to when judging upon and in choosing those methods of Dharma practice? Regardless of what kinds of religions, the practice methods can be broadly divided into the following types:

1. **Prayers** – Including confessions, repentance of one’s conducts, and in the making of



aspirations and wishes;

2. **Recitations** – mantras, Buddhas' Holy Names, or sutras
3. **Visualizations** – themes include the formulae for different types of "meditation", or even the making use of the internal functions of one's body for coordination.

Irrespective of which types of practice methods, it must include the training of one's "mental strength". Otherwise, it would not be able to produce any effects. One of the important points for judging which of the practice methods are the most effective ones is the degree of influence that these can have on one's "mental strength". What percentage will they constitute?

The Abstrusive Power of Prayers

Prayer is a practice method that has been adopted by, and is most suitable for, all beliefs and religions. No matter whether it is a "cult" or a "righteous religion", or whether it is the folk beliefs or those religions with profound teachings, they would all tend to use prayers as part, or even a major part, of their practice methods. Why is it that "prayers" have been so **commonly** made use of? Whether the **effects** of "prayers" are **significant**? Whether they are **quick**? Or whether "prayers" are in possession of magical power? How should one **evaluate** the "time and effectiveness" of this practice method? What kind of objectives does this practice method help to **achieve**? Where does the **key for the success** of "prayers" lie? What are its

merits and demerits?

The fact that the saying of "prayers" has been so **commonly** used is simply because this practice method **does not require any learning and is simple and easy to use**. One would simply need to say out one's wishes in one's mind. A human being is an animal of feelings, and one's whole life is being controlled and interfered by one's emotions. When one's feeling is being disturbed, even though that there is no need to seek for help from others, there is still a need to vent out the disturbed feelings. If one pours out one's feeling to others, there is a chance that some secrets may be disclosed. On the other hand, if one prays to the "God" of one's own belief, one would not only be able to air one's depression without taking the risk of disclosing any secrets, but will in return be able to feel the kindness and pity, with a peace of mind, or even a possibility of having a miracle to appear. In this way, one's depression would soon be gone. **When people are weak, both physically and mentally, they would like to seek for assistances** which can be of benefits to them. Since the saying of "prayers" **is basically "effortless, with no harm in giving it a try. Even if one fails, it would not cause any damage and would most likely to achieve something through it"**. As such, this is a good choice of practice method that most people have adopted. Hence, all beliefs and religions will draw upon this method of praying as one of their practice methods.

Modern psychologists would consider that one who has full confidence on prayers would usually be able to, through prayers, draw upon huge motivational forces and confidence. Is this really true? What is the rationale behind it? For those people who have no beliefs, they would consider "prayers" as some kind of a **psychological dependency for self-comfort**. It is just like a poor man who hopes to get rich by buying a lottery ticket, and would put in all of one's hopes on the possibility of getting a huge sum of money from winning the ticket. To them, this is just being too impractical.

However, for those devoted believers, "prayers" obviously **is a very good and practical way in resolving difficulties**. They would consider that their poverties are the tests bestowed upon them by their "God". Through praying, they would pour out their minds, and would then be able to obtain the pity, praise and confirmation from their "God", so that they can have the courage to stand up again, and to reflect in details upon the revelations brought about by their sufferings.

The Dharma practitioners of Buddhism would consider all kinds of sufferings are due to the "bad

karmic actions" ("karma" are the tractional forces due to one's past actions, whether good or bad ones. The "karmic network" are those good and evil behaviors of one's countless past lives, which would lead to the entanglements of one's 'mental strength' with that of others who had been affected by them. This would form a "network of tractional forces", known as the "karmic network". Please refer to the DVD on the "Inconceivable Law of Karma", published by the Dudjom Buddhist Association) of their own past lives, and are the irrefutable evidence of the "Law of Cause and Effect". These also show the inadequacies of one's previous "behavioral formulae". Through "prayers", one would confess all kinds of regrets that one has in one's own mind, to rectify one's future "behavioral formulae", and to completely eradicate the root of one's "evil karma". It would also enable one to recover the clear responses of one's own "mind", as a higher level in the saying of "prayers". Due to the positive changes in one's "behavioral formulae", one would then be "completely transformed". Though one's "body" may suffer, one's "mind" can harbour the kind of coolness, freshness and wisdom.

Such type of positive thinking of "not considering the sufferings as pains, and be able to transform those sufferings into bright lamps" would enable one to embark upon the starting point on the road for success. This would eventually enable one to achieve success through "prayers", and to be far from sufferings and bewilderments, simply because one's mind has already been parted from them through "prayers" very early on. After all, the true sufferings do not exist in the outside environment, but they exist only in the attitudes and behavioral formulae of one's own mind.



The above description is one kind of influence on the "cleansing of one's own mind through prayers" which is easy to be understood. But there is more to it than this. There are other cases whereby one "prays" for others: for example, the practice method of "dedication" of one's own merits for the benefits of others has been said to be able to widely benefit each and every sentient being. So, what is the rationale behind this? Is its effect practical?

In the early 17th Century, people in the western countries were beginning to try to find the answers to these questions, and to conduct experiments on them. At that time, "science" had already started to challenge "theology", in which the experimentations were rather primitive. For example, people would always pray for the longevity of the royal family members, and in actual circumstances, the royal family members usually lived rather long lives. It was on such kind of basis, that people could come to the conclusion that "prayers" are efficacious. However, later on, people tended to adopt more stringent methods of experimentations to replace the primitive ones.

However, amazingly, many modern methods of experimentations had drawn similar kinds of conclusions. Professor Fredrinze, at the University of Wales, Bangor, had done research in the using of 31 different experiments in order to test whether "prayers" are, indeed, effective or not. These experiments had identified few hundred patients who had just finished their cardiac surgeries, and were in the process of rehabilitation and recovery. They were then divided into two groups in random. For the members of one group, they were prayed by some others to have "speedy recovery". Both members of the two groups, regardless of whether they were being prayed or not, did not know about this experiment.

Professor Fredrinze found that the research findings were most astonishing. He said: "the research findings had shown that those patients who were being prayed for by others while still in hospitals (even though they had no ideas that they were being prayed for by others) had better chances of full recovery because their rehabilitations were much smoother and more steady."

Professor Ross, at the University of Manchester in England, who had also researched into this subject, had said: "The act of praying would produce an internal influence upon the ones who are saying the prayers. From what I have seen, the act of praying is not to ask 'God' to solve the problems, but that the ones who pray for peace could possibly become peaceful persons. The effect of praying, firstly, is to

start with having an internal influence. What makes people feel to become hopeful is the fact that this type of internal influence would also exert an influence on the outside world.”

True Reasons Why “Prayers” can Produce Effects

Would the above-mentioned deduction on “prayers would produce an internal effect, which would then affect the exterior” to be correct? Those who challenged the “power of prayers” would usually ask: “could prayers really change the exterior conditions such as the weather?” This question can be regarded as to “whether the effects of one’s mental strength, apart from the influencing of one’s own mind, can also affect the minds of others, as well as whether it can affect the outside environment?”

Human beings have undergone long periods of the “evolutionary process”, such that the internal “mental wisdom” of human beings has been continuously elevated. Following the mutual influences among people, they have jointly constructed the environment, such that the external environment itself has been continuously ever-changing with the passing of time, which is an indisputable fact. Due to the neglect of most people on the importance of environmental protections, the weather has been worsened. This point shows that the “internal cognition” of an individual would not only influence one’s own behaviours, but would also have effects on the “internal cognitions” of others, resulting in the changes of their behaviours. When this kind of “mutual influences on the mental strengths” of the concerned parties has been accumulated, up to a certain level, these would “mutually” produce some changes in their behaviours, the outcomes of which would then be significantly reflected in the external environment.

As it would take time for the accumulation of the “mental strength”, and depending upon whether the “mental strength” is weak or strong, this would result in different time periods required for the accumulation before any outcomes could be observed. Hence, it would not be easy to prove that the “mental strength” can influence the external environment. Despite this, such kind of cognition has not only been recognized by modern psychologists, but has, in fact, been pointed out as a kind of “truth” by the Lord Buddha Shakyamuni, the founder of Buddhism.

The “Maha-vaipulya-buddhavatamsaka-sutra” (simply, or better, known as the “Avatamsaka-sutra”) of Buddhism has said that “everything comes from

the mind”. This refers to the fact that all things in the whole universe are formed and constructed through the evolution of the “mental strengths” of sentient beings. The mutual influences arising from the “mental strengths” of people would form the common behaviours of people, and is known as the “collective karma” in the Buddhist teachings, while the behaviours formed by the “mental strength” of an individual is known as the individual “karma”.

The external environments, such as the mountains, rivers, the land and so on, that are formed by the “collective karma” is known as the “dependent environment”; that is, the retributions formed according to the “collective karma”, while an individual’s internal body and intelligence that are the results of one’s own “karma” is known as the “direct retributions”, which are directly one hundred percent formed by one’s own individual “karma”. Thus, the Buddhist teaching has broadly called these internal and external circumstances altogether as “karmic retributions”, including the two kinds of “karmas”.

As “all things come from the mind”, and so if one wishes to change anything, the key method is not to focus on the deconstruction of the things, since this approach is only the “stop-gap measure which would not really get into the fundamentals of things”. To completely change the two kinds of “karmas”, it must begin with one’s own “mind”. If one can change the wrong cognitions of one’s “mind” into the correct ones during one’s lifetime, such as the positive and proactive mindset of “not considering sufferings as pains and transforming the sufferings as the bright lamps” for one’s Dharma practice, then the two kinds of “karmas” would no longer be the interfering force that influence one’s internal “mental strength”, but instead it would become an ancillary power. Those who adopt such approach of practice would not only be able to live happier while alive, but they would also be able to get connected to similar “positive spiritual domains” after death because of this positive “mental strength” and to be reborn there. Hence, because of the continuous accumulation of one’s “mental strength”, one would become successful in making real changes with their effects to appear.

If one would like to go one step further in getting rid of all the “tractional forces”, not to accept the retributions of any form of rebirths, and be able to exist freely with one’s own will, then one should not go in circles within the “whirlpools of tractional forces” as a result of one’s “attachments to all things” in this world. To be able to “free oneself from those tractional forces, one must first be able to abandon”. If one really wants to truly free oneself, it would be inadequate to just rely upon



the ordinary “mental strength”, because the forces so produced from our “karmas” far exceeded our human imaginations. The Buddhist teachings have called this as the “**inconceivable law of karma**”. (Please refer to the DVD on the “Inconceivable Law of Karma”, published by the Dudjom Buddhist Association.) Because of this reason, if the part on the training of “mind” in our ordinary Dharma practice is small, its effect would only be able to improve or enhance a certain portion of the two kinds of “karmas”. However, this would **definitely not be able** to liberate oneself from the tractions of the “cycle of karmic existence”.

Whether the “prayers” could produce any effects would have to depend upon the degree and to what extent would one’s “mental strength” be aroused through one’s saying of the prayers? As well as upon the degree and to what extent would the amount of others’ “mental strengths” to be aroused by one? A “prayer” must involve the following aspects:

1. the one who is saying the prayers;
2. the being to be requested for help – for example: “God, Buddha, demon, etc.”;
3. the prayers – including the sayings that come from one’s mind;
4. the onlookers – including those “participants” and/or “onlookers” during the open prayer sessions;
5. the person or thing being blessed.

If the “one saying the prayers” **has full confidence** on the ability of the “one being requested for help”, to the extent of having one hundred percentage confidence without the slightest doubt, such kind of “prayers” would

be conducted in an **extremely sincere** atmosphere. The “**mental strength**” of the “one saying the prayers” would be **extremely involved**, and as a result it would cause the internal **self potential** of oneself to arise. If the theme of the “prayer” is something that the “one saying the prayers” has earnestly yearned for, then the “mental strength” of the “one saying the prayers” will be **magnified by many times**.

If this kind of potential that has been caused to arise by oneself is adequate enough to deal with the request from the “one saying the prayers”, even if the “one being requested for help” has not received the message of the request, or does not agree to the request of the “one saying the prayers”, the problem of the “one saying the prayers” would still be fully resolved, or partially resolved, due to the fact that one’s potential has been caused to arise adequately. As the “one saying the prayers” **does not know its abstruseness**, one would all the more considered that it was due to the power of the “one to whom one has requested for help”, and would thus adore him the more. However, the Lord Buddha Shakyamuni regarded this kind of situation as being “foolish and ignorant”, as the “one saying the prayers” simply does not know that he himself has boundless capabilities **hidden within one’s own “nature of mind”** (“Nature of mind” is also known as the “Buddha Nature”, or the “intrinsic nature”. It is something that one originally possessed and is the clearest **awareness** with infinite power and abilities. Please refer to the articles on the “Meaning of Near-Death Experiences” in Issues 4 & 5 of the “Lake of Lotus”).

How to Make Prayers to Produce Effects

If the “one saying the prayers” **does not have full confidence** on the ability of the “one being requested for help”, or the theme of the “prayer” does not represent the earnest wishes of the “one saying the prayers”, the “signals for help” being sent out by the “one saying the prayers” would then be weakened, and so it would be difficult to arouse the self potential of oneself, or that even the “one being requested for help” would be unable to receive the “signals for help” from the “one saying the prayers”. Such kind of “prayers” would normally fail, and would not be able to solve the problems that one has been praying for.

If the “one being requested for help” really has sufficient ability and have self-confidence of helping the “one saying the prayers” to solve the latter’s problem, upon receiving the message for help, one would first have to consider whether the “one saying the prayers” is qualified with the right conditions for

making the request before one would decide whether to help or not. For example, whether the “one saying the prayers” is the servant of “God”, and whether he/she is humble enough. **The fundamental requirement is usually on “confidence”.**

Although the Lord Buddha is in possession of the “unconditioned great love and compassion”, one would expect that He does not need to examine the qualification and conditions of the requester. However, the first door that the “one saying the prayers” would have to open before the “one being requested for help” would fully accept the request for help is that the former needs to have full confidence on the latter and to completely accept the latter’s assistance. If this door has not been opened, or if the confidence is inadequate such that the door for the acceptance of assistance would be in the state of being only half-opened, this would affect the speed and the success rate of the assistance rendered. In other words, **the key point in making “prayers” to produce results will depend upon the levels of “confidence”** that the “one saying the prayers” has on the “one being requested for help”.

The content of the “prayers” is also a **key to either success or failure** of the request for assistance. The contents (**does it clearly represent the wishes and aspirations; or whether there are any praises on the “one being requested for help”; or whether one is humble enough; or whether one is sincere enough; or whether one is honest enough; or whether the “prayer” is of great inspirational value; or whether the contents meet the requirements of the “one being requested for help”, and so on**) are the **parts that should not be neglected**.

A complete and inspiring “prayer” can make the “one saying the prayers” to be **deeply involved** while “saying the prayer”, and would thus be easier to arouse the internal potential of one’s “mental strength”. At the same time, this would deeply touch those of both the “ones being requested for help” and the “onlookers” in their hearts, and thus **the ancillary power would be magnified by many times**. If the “onlookers” themselves are also the “participants”, and if the more the people involved, the greater will be the convergence of their “mental strengths”, resulting in their effects to become stronger. If the problem that needs to be resolved is a kind of “collective karma”, then the amounts of “mental strengths” of people that need to be accumulated would need to be greater. Otherwise, it would be difficult to resolve the problem and counter-act the tractional forces from it. This is due to the fact that the people and things that are involved in the “collective karma” are relatively more

complicated, and so the amounts of efforts needed to resolve this would also have to **drastically increase** correspondingly.

The above-described research on “prayers” has made use of 31 experiments to assess and test how effective “prayers” could be. The **research findings are amazing**: “the research findings had shown that those patients who were being prayed for by others while still in hospitals (even though they had no ideas that they were being prayed for by others) **had better chances of full recovery because their rehabilitations were much smoother and more steady.**”

These findings showed that the “mental strengths” from a group of people having common good-wills in saying prayers would actually make the “persons or things being blessed” to produce changes. This kind of common “mental strengths” is a kind of “collective karma”, and is a commonly-produced “tractional force”. If the “ones being blessed” know about the wishes and aspirations of the “ones saying the prayers”, **their “hearts and minds” would then be touched, and thus the effects so produced will be even greater.**

Hence, if the “objective for one’s Dharma practice” is on asking for some “worldly desires”, or to be “reborn in good destinations”, the power of “prayers” would have a certain effect, but then **this effect would not be the best one**. Why is it so? If the “prayers” come from the wishes and desires of one’s “mind” as **the spark** to light up one’s internal potential, and if such desires contain the seeds of “greed, hatred and ignorance” in having too much “negative energies”, all of which



would only pollute one's own **potential**. If one uses such kind of "negative energies" to resolve one's problems, then those problems would become much more complicated. If one gets rebirth based on such kind of "negative energies", it would be extremely easy for one to **get connected and be reborn into the negative "evil realms" (of demons, animals, hungry ghosts and hell)**.

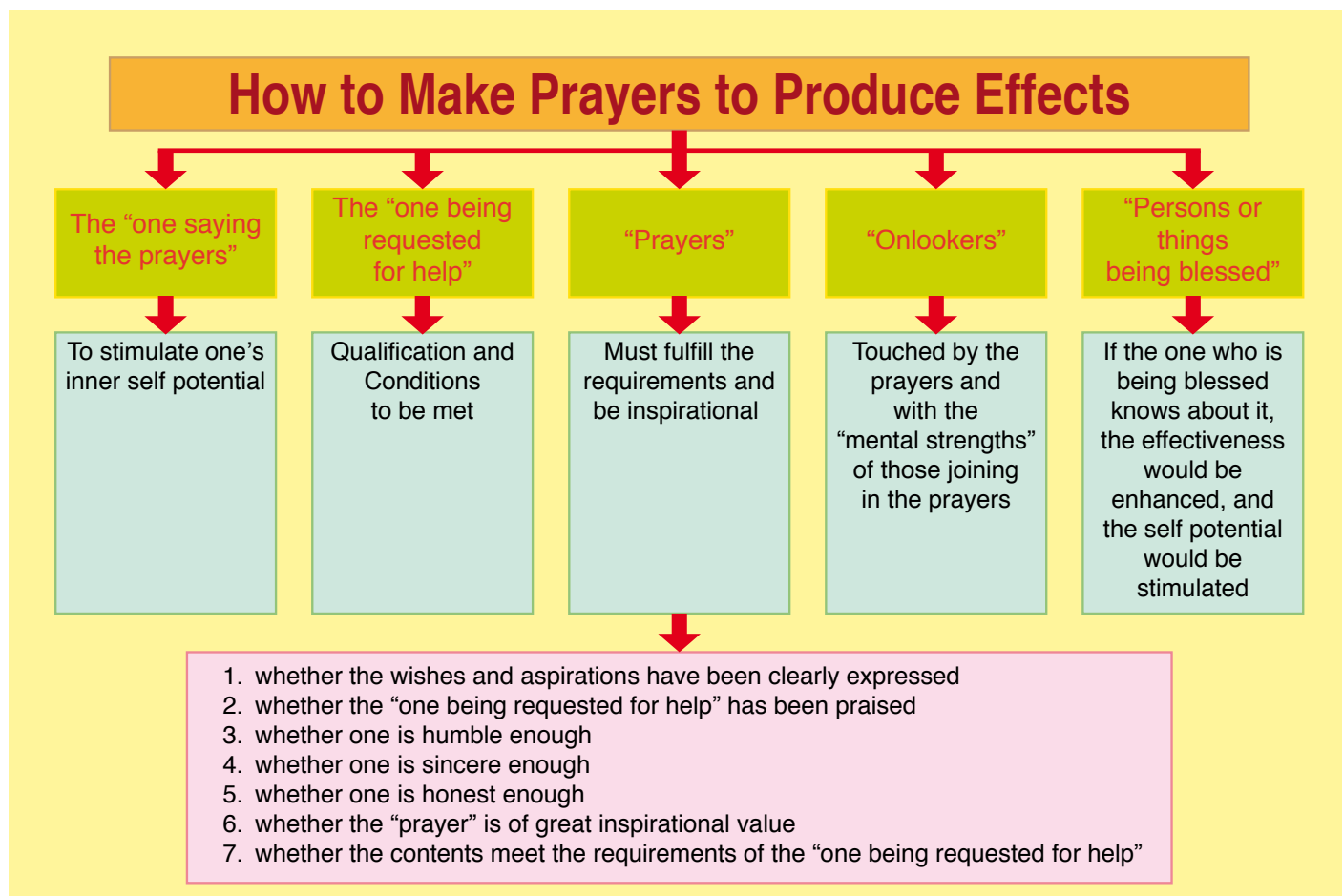
Even if the contents of the "prayers" are good-will blessings for all sentient beings, if the words in the "prayers" are too difficult to understand, or too loose to have any inspirational value, it would be difficult for one's internal potential to arise, and so the effects for saying the prayers would then be reduced. In other words, **the "mental strengths" generated from the "prayers" would have to be affected by many different elements from all aspects. Hence, the "training and application" of the "mental strength" would not be direct enough**, and so the time required to accumulate one's "mental strength" would have to be longer in order that it can achieve any success.

For the general believers of most religions, "prayer" is the spiritual food for their spiritual life, and is also the bridge of communications between the believers

and the "God" of their beliefs. To these believers of most religions, in many circumstances, they would make **one-way** reports to their "God" and not having direct inter-communication dialogues with each other, but they still believe that "the saying of prayers" is a method of direct communication with their "God", simply because they do not have any other practice methods. And because of this, "the saying of prayers" **has been downgraded as requests for materialistic wishes**, in many instances, and has thus lost its **original value and meaning** – that is, **to stimulate the inner potential of one's own "intrinsic nature"**.

Though there are empirical evidences to support that "prayers" do have certain degrees of effectiveness, yet to what extent are they really effective? Are there any kinds of **inadequacies and shortcomings**? What are the highest objectives that "prayers" can **help** one **to achieve**? These will be further discussed in the next issue... **(To be Continued)** 🦄

(Note: The newly released book on "The Wisdom in Directing One's Sharma Practice (1)" has already been published. Its contents include the articles on "The Wisdom in Directing One's Dharma Practice" from Issues 1 to 10).





Excerpt of Last Chapter

If we can have some kind of understanding or realization on the “Eight Negations”, during the process in trying to understand the Buddhist Dharma, then our **wisdom may be revealed**. Indeed, the goal to learn the Buddhist Dharma, from the very beginning, is to reveal one’s own wisdom.

Theory & Practice of the Buddhist Teachings

The reason why I want you to be aware of the “Eight Negations” is because there is a deeper meaning behind it, such that after you begin to understand them at the knowledge level, you can continue to experience, and to become aware of the **“intrinsic nature”** of all things at a higher level of awareness. So, what is this higher level of awareness? Why do we need to be aware of the “Eight Negations”? For what purpose? Actually, the ultimate goal is to help us to realize the “intrinsic nature” of **“Emptiness”**. Hence, the first thing that you need to do is to break down the dichotomy of dualisms.

Our thinking pattern is always dualistic in nature, such as “self” and “others”, “subject” and “object”, “creation” and “destruction”, and so forth. Hence, we are always bound and limited by such kinds of dualistic concepts and thinking patterns. Remember what we have said before: **the limitations of our thinking are equal to the limitations of our capabilities**. Hence, if we really want to realize the “intrinsic nature” of all things, we first have to discard these limitations in our thinking patterns. **Unlimited thinking is equal to boundless**

capacities.

Hence, to **break down the dichotomy of dualisms** can assist us in “realizing” the nature of **“Emptiness”** (that is, the state of **“Neither Existence Nor Voidness”**), and thus realize our own “intrinsic nature” (also known as the **“Buddha Nature”**). Then, what is the reason for doing so? There are two main objectives, one is to attain liberation from the “cycle of karmic existence” we called “Samsara”; while the other one is to attain the “most complete and perfect enlightenment” (that is, **“Buddhahood”**).



The liberation from “Samsara” is not yet the final or ultimate destination, as it is merely a midway for our stopover (like a “half-way house”), whereupon we can continue to practice the Dharma in either the “Buddha Field” or in the “Pure Land”. Then, through this continuous process of Dharma practice, we will finally be able to attain the “most complete and perfect enlightenment” (that is, “Buddhahood”), which is the final destination, as the ultimate objective of Dharma practice.

Whether we can succeed on these two important aspects (that is, the Fruits) will very much depend on our own Dharma practice, particularly on our ways of thinking, our “View, Meditation and Action”. Hence, whether one can succeed on the “Realization” of “Emptiness” will have to depend upon the degrees and levels of those practices in one’s own Dharma practice. This is because the limitation of one’s thought is equal to the limitation of one’s capability. On the contrary, unlimited thinking is equal to unrestricted boundless capabilities. Hence, the degrees and levels of one’s “Realization” of “Emptiness” are equal to the degrees and levels of one’s own spiritual attainment or capability.

For instance, the “primal illusive ignorance from beginningless time” of the Great Bodhisattva Maitreya has not yet been subdued, and so he still has not yet attained the “most complete and perfect enlightenment” of “Buddhahood”. But, of course, he is already very near to it, and he is a great realized “Knowledge-holder” (Vidyadhara) of the highest level. This “primal illusive ignorance” of him came from the fact that this “ignorance” is illusive in nature, and yet this has been accumulated through his countless past lives since time immemorial, and he needs to subdue this final bit of “ignorance” in order to attain the “most complete and perfect enlightenment”!

Levels of “Awareness” and “Realization”

Thus, in the process of Dharma practice, there are various levels of “Awareness” and “Realization”, and hence various levels of “Fruitings”. One example is the story of “The Monkey King” in the Chinese legendary tale of the “Journey to The West”. Even though this is not a true story, but only a legend, we can still learn from this story as some kind of illustration.

According to the story, at that time The Monkey King was challenging the Lord Buddha by saying that “I will win you in all aspects, as I can go to the end of the world!” In fact, when the Monkey King mentioned

about this, he is already being trapped by his own mind, as he believes that this world has an end with a boundary. This is his first limitation!

Then, he said to The Lord Buddha again: “I can go there faster than you, and then I will do something there. You just cannot compete with me!” This is his second limitation as he thought that he is the best. Then, he said: “I can just take a jump, and it can take me to go 108,000 miles far away.” To him, this is the fastest speed that he can make, but this becomes his third limitation!

These three incidents have clearly demonstrated the kinds of limitations that the Monkey King has in his own thinking patterns! In other words, he will never be able to break away from his own limitations! Furthermore, according to the story, he did take a number of jumps and went to the end of the world, as he had envisaged it. There, he took a piss so as to prove that he had been there. After which, he went happily back to the Lord Buddha, teasing Him again by saying, “I was there, but I did not see you there! So, I must be faster than you, and so you must have lost!” This is his fourth limitation!

His limitations lie in the fact that he did not even know what he was doing, neither did he know where his own limited capability lies? In fact, he thought that he was the best in the whole world. This story shows us that we are all trapped by our own limited thinking patterns, but we still believe that we are so marvelous!

On the contrary, the Lord Buddha is “omni-potent” (that is, limitless in His powers), since His mind and wisdom is also limitless! Hence, “space” to the Lord Buddha is also boundless and endless! Thus, the story ends by showing us that the Monkey King, no matter how many jumps he had made, he was still being trapped and simply remained within the palm of the Lord Buddha, and so he finally had to accept his failure of trying to get to the end of the world!

This story has a special meaning to us Buddhists: why are we being trapped by the “Six Realms” in the “cycle of karmic existence” (“Samsara”)? And why do we only have limited capabilities? The story can help to give us an answer: all these so-called “limitations and boundaries” are, in fact, all fabricated by our own minds! Even though we are fully aware of the reason behind it, and then start practicing on our Dharma Practice, we may still not be able to have a full “Realization” on the state of “Emptiness”..... (To be continued) 🍀

EPILOGUE

The Buddhist teachings are meticulous and profound, while its methods of practice are practical and achievable. Nevertheless, the teachings are as abstruse and comprehensive as an ocean such that it is not an easy task for one to even just trying to grasp its contents in a concise and accurate manner. Therefore, our Association aims to help reveal the abstruse meanings of the Buddhist teachings in such a way that it can be easily understood by the general public through the distribution of CDs, VCDs and DVDs, either free of charge or with a cost.

Though we have limited resources and capabilities, we still humbly wish, with a sincerity of heart, to publish this bimonthly journal of the "Lake of Lotus", in order that the essence of the Buddhist teachings can be spread and popularized. We earnestly hope that the readers will help with your meritorious deeds by supporting this publication of the "Lake of Lotus", through subscriptions and donations, as well as in our various projects in the preaching of Buddhism, so as to sow the seed of meritorious cause in benefiting all our motherly sentient beings.

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