

# LISTEN TO THE SONG OF THE GANGES RIVER

Dr. Guo Hui Zhen

## **Introduction:**

Dr. Guo Hui Zhen was an oncologist. She was very motivated, enthusiastic, and wholehearted in her work. Her compassion and sincerity not only encouraged the sick, but also wakened the healthy ones, influenced them to study the Buddha Dharma and to recite the Buddha's name.

The following is a very rich and emotional speech with friends at the "Wisdom Buddhist Study Society" of Zhong Yuan University. Despite suffering from severe cancer herself, Dr. Zhen endured the pain by relying on her extremely solid faith-and-vow in the practice of The Buddha's Name Recitation and continued to give Dharma talks. After acknowledging that she had cancer, Dr. Zhen said, "*Now it is time for me to single-mindedly recite the Buddha's name and to prepare for rebirth in the Pure Land. 1[1]*" (After this lecture, Dr. Zhen resigned from her post and ascended the mountains to become a nun).

In this life amidst the sea of suffering, we are still attached and unable to let go of everything that is "ours". Everyone is busy from dawn to dusk throughout his or her life. At the end when the final minute has arrived, we look back and lament that life has passed in vain. *Dear all, what would you want your life to be? How do you escape the binding of the birth-and-death cycle?* We hope that this speech will bring the facts and reflection that will help you to find the direction back to your original homeland!

## **All Respected Teachers and Friends:**

As I stand before you, I am very hesitant and embarrassed, especially when I see that the majority of the audience is equivalent to my seniors and teachers. *First of all, I would like to explain why a mediocre person like me could go up and speak with all of you?* The reason is due to the influence of one of my patients, and I often retell the story of how this patient helped me to understand many issues in life. We often have to pay a very high price in order to understand one sentence in a Sutra 2[2], even if it is a very simple one.

This patient was in her thirties and she got colon cancer. She kept crying when she came

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<sup>1[1]</sup> *Pure Land or Western Pure Land (Sukhavati)*. It also refers to as the *Land of Ultimate Bliss*. According to Buddhists scripture, there is a world lying very far to the West of our present world. The teaching host of that world is Amitabha Buddha. His name means measureless lights and endless longevity. He vows that whoever can recite his name at least ten times at death, he and the sages of his world will come and welcome that individual to his world. His world is extremely adorned and beautiful. His world is completely made up of seven kinds of jewels such as gold, silver, lapis lazuli, crystal, mother-of-pearl, rubies, and carnelian. It is also called the Land of Ultimate Bliss because the residents there enjoy only bliss and have no sufferings of any kinds. The number of residents in his world is innumerable and incalculable. The residents of his world are all sages and usually they are referred to as the Great Pure Sea-like Assembly.

<sup>2[2]</sup> *Sutra or Sutta*. This refers to the collections of the teachings of the Buddha. They compiled into several sets called the Great Tripitaka. Tripitaka refers to three treasures- the Sutra (Teachings), the Vinaya (Precepts), and the Shastra (Commentaries).

to the hospital. At that time, I was only an Oncologist Intern. Looking at her medical history, I found that she went through two surgeries, but the cancer kept coming back. Indeed, there was no cure. She kept crying until she could not talk, and she was not sure of what to do. She wanted to talk to the doctor to find more about her condition. After my shift was over that day, I visited her and at the same time, introduced her to some basic principles of Buddhism. Unexpectedly, she was deeply moved and said with wide-open eyes: *“All these years, why nobody ever told me about these principles? Why did I have to endure thirty plus years full of sufferings and not until my life almost ends that I can hear about the Buddha Dharma 3[3]?”* These were just a few short sentences, but they seemed to penetrate through my heart. Afterward, she cried miserably, and so did I.

At that time, Master Xue Gung 4[4] was still alive, and he lectured on the sutra on every Wednesday of the week. Everyday after work, I usually stayed in the hospital to talk and comfort the patients, except on Wednesdays since I had to attend the Master's lectures. She saw that I was very happy on Wednesday as I prepared myself for attending the lectures, so she said, *“I hope that I can go too, but regrettably, I do not have the chance.”* I replied, *“In the future, you will have the opportunity.”* Finally, she did make it to the lecture. When I arrived at the Flower Adornment Hall of Tse Guang Library, I saw her sitting in the first row. However, half way through the lecture she grasped her belly, cried and walked out. Her conditions deteriorated and caused her too much pain so that she could not listen to the lecture any longer. At that moment, I suddenly understood the meaning of one sentence in the Opening Verse 5[5] of the Sutra:

*“The unsurpassed, deep, profound, and wonderful Dharma,  
In a hundred thousand million of eons is extremely difficult to encounter,  
Now that I’ve come to receive and hold it within my sight and hearing,  
I vow to fathom the Tathagata’s 6[6] true and actual meaning.”*

Influenced by her, from that day on, I am no longer mindful about my scanty understanding. I always try to work harder, and urgently introduce the essential principles in Buddha Dharma [that I can understand] to everybody; I talk to everybody about the happiness that Buddha Dharma can bring to us. Money cannot buy this kind of happiness, and thieves cannot steal it. Regardless of circumstances and states, and how people try to measure this kind of happiness base on their worldly concepts of “blessing” and “disaster”, our inner mind always have the full peace, happiness, and brightness.

I asked Dharma friends in the Buddhist Study Society about the topic they are investigating, or the sutra they are studying in this session. Uncle Xu told me that they are studying the “Sutra of the Eight Great Human Enlightenments”. Surely, everyone has read this

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<sup>3[3]</sup> **Buddha Dharma or Buddhadharma.** This refers to Buddhism, the philosophy and teaching of the Buddha.

<sup>4[4]</sup> **Master Xue Gung.** This refers to the lay elderly master Li Bing Nan, henceforth referred to as Master Li. He is a well-known Buddhist in Taiwan. He practiced and lectured extensively on the Pure Land Dharma-door (Pure Land Method). He passed away in 1986, at ninety-seven years old. After his cremation, thousands pieces of colorful sariras (relics) were collected.

<sup>5[5]</sup> **Opening Verse of the Sutra.** Each Buddhist sutra has an opening verse that praises the merits and rarity of the sutra. The verse is written by a Chinese Empress in China during the Tang Dynasty (the heyday of Buddhism in China).

<sup>6[6]</sup> **Tathāgata** (pronounced: *tāht-āhgatah*) in Pali and Sanskrit meaning "one who has thus-gone (thus-come, thus-perfected one"); Tathagata refers to one who on the way of truth has attained supreme enlightenment (samyak sambuddha).

Sutra and possibly memorized it as well.

The First Enlightenment is:

*“The world is impermanent. Countries are perilous and fragile. The body is a source of pain and composed of four elements 7[7], ultimately empty. The five skandhas 8[8] are not the true Self 9[9]. Life and Death are nothing, but a series of transformations....”*

Despite knowing the principles by heart, most of us do not believe in them. Although the Buddha said that the world itself is full of sufferings and impermanent, but on the contrary, you might feel that it is a very happy place. Every morning when you get up, you eat breakfast, drink coffee; your eyes will see the clear sky and the white clouds. Ah! life itself is so beautiful and happy! If this is the case, then it is normal. However, the moments of happiness pass by so quickly. Supposedly some challenges or difficulties suddenly arise, and you will not see the clear sky and the white clouds anymore. You will not see the blooming of hundreds of flower 10[10]. Your mind will no longer feel happy.

I would like to tell you a few true stories that I encountered in the hospital. In these stories, each patient was my teacher; each of them taught me a principle that the Buddha talked about in the sutras. They verified and proved the Buddha’s teaching. They caused me to have absolute faith in the Buddha’s words, and that the Buddha was “The one who tells the truth, and never lies.”

Many patients asked me, *“Doctor, how old are you?”*

I replied, *“Thirty two years old”*.

They then would ask, *“Are you married yet? I can introduce you to...?”*

I would then ask them, *“Is your life happy?”* Strangely, no one ever said, *“Yes!”*

Until one day, I encountered a patient with uterine cancer. Each time she came, she always put on her make up very nicely, with red lips and beautiful polished nails on her fingers and toes. After the examination, she wanted to introduce me to someone.

She said, *“My nephew works at Guo Tai Hospital. He is a very courteous and a gentleman.”*

I asked her, *“You are very happy, aren’t you?”*

She replied, *“Yes, my husband treats me very well. My children are very filial, and we are well off.”*

If that was the case, I would like to congratulate her. She was the only one who said that

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<sup>7[7]</sup> **Four Elements.** This phrase refers to the earth, water, wind, and fire elements. In Buddhists’ belief, the body is composed of these four elements. Earth is the solid component, water is the liquid component, wind is the air component, and fire is the heat component in a body. In Buddhist context, this usually refers to the impermanence of life.

<sup>8[8]</sup> **Skandhas.** This refers to the states of the mind such as form, feeling, perception, mental formation, consciousness, etc. (from Wikipedia).

<sup>9[9]</sup> **Self** (atman) In Brahmanism, Self is roughly equivalent to the concept of “Soul” in Western philosophy. Self is understood as an entity that is eternally in absolute bliss, whereas in Buddhism, the concept of Self is denied; neither within nor outside of physical and mental manifestations is there anything that could be designated as an independent, imperishable essence. The true Self mentioned over here is another name of Dharma-kāya (lit. Truth Body or Reality Body), i.e. the true nature of Buddha, the transcendental reality of the universe. In other words, Dharma-kāya is the unity of Buddha with everything existing.

<sup>10[10]</sup> **Blooming of hundreds of flowers.** This is a Chinese saying, which refers to happiness.

she had happiness. I was happy for her because when patients came to the hospital, they often cried and lamented:

*“Doctor, don’t you know? I have to borrow others’ money for the examination. My children are not happy at all.”* Or,

*“Oh, when I go home, no one pays attention to me. I have been sickened for too long and people do not want to take care of me anymore.”*

Also, no one asked, *“Dad, have you eaten yet?”*

Or, *“Since I got this illness, my husband left me.”*

The majority belonged to this last type of people. The details of each case might vary, but the content was quite similar. Only this lady was very lucky to have happiness. A short while after her visit, one of the nurses read the newspaper and surprisingly found that the lady had killed herself. The nurse told me, *“The newspaper reported that her body was found by the river. She left her home for about five days, after which she committed suicide.”*

I asked, *“That lady was very blissful, very happy. Why did she commit suicide?”*

Honored audience, try to think about it. *Why could her husband’s love not change her suicidal thought? Why was the filiality of her children also unable to pull her back? Why money could not buy a peaceful mind?* Her husband’s love and the filiality of the children still could not replace the pain in her body. *Why was that such a beautiful woman had to run away from home, wandered around, and finally jumped into the river?*

Probably, she felt that life was so beautiful before. She never experienced any suffering, and she did not know that *“The world is impermanent, countries are fragile.”* Her mind was not prepared psychologically. Therefore, when challenges arose, she could not handle them. She did not have the “immunization” to protect her from these challenges, and she was not capable of fighting back. She could not endure the pain and had to kill herself instead. I was very regretful that I did not introduce Buddha Dharma to her so that she could change her mind and turn toward the light, toward Amitabha Buddha 11[11]. For these kinds of sufferings perhaps everyone might think, *“This is only a minority, only few would commit suicide.”*

In reality, there were many suicide cases. I worked in the Oncology department, if there were one single day that we did not encounter patients wanting to take their lives, then that day would be considered as a very rare day, a very auspicious day! The truth was that everyday I often heard the saying: *“The sooner I die the better.”* When people wished for better health

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<sup>11[11]</sup> **Amitabha Buddha.** This refers to the teaching Buddha host of the Pure Land. His name means measureless lights and longevity. He emits lights throughout the universe to receive living beings to his world. See note 1 for more. “Why do we recite “Namo Amitabha Buddha”?” It is because Amitabha Buddha has a great affinity with living beings in the ten directions. Before Amitabha Buddha realized Buddhahood, during his cultivation on the “cause ground,” he was a Bhikshu named Dharma Treasury (Dharmākara) who made forty-eight vows. Among those vows was one that said, “I vow that after I realize Buddhahood, any living beings throughout the ten directions reciting my name will certainly realize Buddhahood. If they will not be able to realize Buddhahood, then I will not realize Buddhahood.” The power of Amitabha Buddha’s vows is like a magnet; living beings of the ten directions are like iron filings. That is how he draws beings of the ten directions to the Land of Ultimate Bliss. What if they aren’t attracted? Amitabha Buddha vowed that he himself wouldn’t realize Buddhahood if they couldn’t be! Therefore, all who recite the name of Amitabha Buddha have the opportunity to realize Buddhahood.” Excerpt from Lecture by Venerable Master Hsuan Hua. (From <http://online.sfsu.edu/~rone/Buddhism/BTTTexts/Buddha%20Mindfulness.html>)

and caring but did not receive them, they often wanted to take their lives. At night in the hospital, I usually had to resolve these suicidal cases. It was not that people did not want to live anymore, but because the pain from the illness was too much. They just did not know how to handle it.

Besides, there were patients who could neither live nor die. They laid and moaned miserably in bed. There was one patient with a cancerous ulcer in the area below the abdomen. Surgeons had to create a temporary anus on the abdomen, but there was no way to cure the cancer. The excrement just came out directly from the gut. This patient's room was on the third floor, but you could smell the odor all the way from the second floor. It was not that this patient had anything special, but it would be the same when any of us encountered a similar situation. When her children took care of her, they had to wear a mask covering their mouths and noses. Everyday she wanted to kill herself, but she did not have the chance. One day, her son went out to get her breakfast, she tried her best to get up, climbed over the window, and jumped off. As she jumped off, her son had just returned. He quickly ran over to rescue her. Instead, she fell from third floor and was seriously injured. Having already suffered from the illness and with the additional injury, everyday the pain was indescribable for her. She could neither live nor die. Her life was not over yet, and suicide was of no use. Even if she succeeded, she would endlessly reincarnate in the six realms <sup>12</sup>[12]. The endless pain and sufferings will cycle itself.

The poet Rabindranath Tagore has said:

*“To live like a beautiful summer blossom, to die like a beautiful autumn moon”*

Do you want to live like *“a beautiful summer blossom?”* Perhaps, it is not difficult to do so. However, to die like *“a beautiful autumn moon”* you need to work very hard to prepare for it! Many times, there were people criticizing those who studied Buddhism and said, *“Oh gosh, how come you all like to talk about “dying” and about the “end”, as if you don’t care about life anymore. There are many things to do in life, especially for those of you who practice the Pure Land Method <sup>13</sup>[13]. Everyday, you recite Amitabha Buddha to prepare to be reborn in the West. This is too pessimistic.”* The truth is that our life journey is similar to that of painting a dragon. Each touch, each color is very important. The time of passing is similar to

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<sup>12</sup>[12] **The six realms** refer to three good realms: Heaven, Human, Ashura, and three bad realms: Animal, Hungry Ghost, and Hell. One's death is not the end. A living body can die, but his or her consciousness never dies. Upon the death of a body, the consciousness leaves the body and goes to one of the above six realms. The Heaven and the Human are the better places of these six, but the birth-death cycle is unavoidable. Everybody has to go through the birth-death cycle into one of the six realms. When one does good deeds, creates merit and virtue, then one will be born into the good realms. But when one makes offenses, bad karma and transgresses, one will be born into the three evil realms. When one is reborn to the Western Pure Land, then he or she will escape the six realms, and will never have to endure any sufferings.

<sup>13</sup>[13] **Pure Land Method** is the method of reciting Amitabha Buddha. Amitabha Buddha primarily means Buddha of Infinite Life and Infinite Light. As we recite (or chant), the sound of the Buddha name arises from our mind, our minds focus on and embrace that sound. As the mind concentrates on the sound of Amitabha Buddha, our selfish, intolerant thought is replaced with the single pure thought of the name of the Buddha. After the name of Amitabha Buddha has been in our mind continuously for a long time, and we improve our thoughts and actions, our true nature, which is the same as that of the Buddha, will gradually be uncovered. If we made the vow to do so and have belief in the teaching of the Buddha, we will have progressed on our path forever to have a Buddha's mind and heart of wisdom and compassion, so that we can be of benefit to all beings that need our help. On a daily basis we will continue to benefit as our mind will become calmer and more peaceful, and our practice will help us to be more sincere and kind. Every moment of peace is a moment of contentment and happiness. Ultimately our vow to be reborn in the Pure Land, our unwavering belief, and moral living daily, as well as our chanting will enable us to attain a perfect enlightenment, that is Buddhahood. (From <http://www.amitabha-gallery.org/index.html>)

that of putting the last touch to the eyes of the dragon. The times of birth and death are very important. There is no single touch that can be done casually. Reciting Buddha's name is a terrific method of cultivating the best thought for the mind. Work hard at it while we are alive, and toward the end, this is the best of the best.

I have been speaking for a while now, but I still have not talked about the main topic of the day, "*Listen to the Song of the Ganges River.*" A few years ago, I had the opportunity to visit India. When I sat on a boat that was sailing along the bank of the Ganges River <sup>14</sup>[14], my mind was very calm and peaceful. The sounds of the river gave me the feeling as if I was moving in the water of *Life and Death*". When listening to these sounds, I heard the sounds of children and adults, of crying and laughing. All of these sound blended together to form the ten-thousand-merited Holy Name "*Amitabha Buddha.*" Let us look at the images of the Ganges River, every single bobbing wave, your own shadow, your relatives and friends, the sunset, the bird and the floating clouds in the horizon, all these images blended to form the river of "*Life*". Let us look together at these images and listen to the Song of the Ganges River, from the Song of "*Life-and-Death Cycle of the Ganges River*" to the Song of "*The Enlightened Buddha.*" With us, the Ganges is a very familiar river because in the sutras, the Buddha often used the terminology "*sands of the Ganges River*" to depict the meaning of "measureless and boundless". In this "Ganges River of Life", we are the people swimming across the river.

The boat kept advancing to a place by the riverbank where people were cremated. The Indian way of cremation is very simple. They do not need a coffin, but use only a piece of cloth to wrap the corpse. They burn the body by the riverbank. Even Mrs. Gandhi was no exception (she had the flag wrap her body). The rich folks have enough firewood, so they can burn the corpse completely to ash and scatter it into the river. The poor ones, on the other hand, just burn the corpse casually and dump the remains into the river. When I was sailing pass this area, I saw remains of a blackened leg that had not yet burned to ash. *Let us try to ask this half-burned leg belonged to whom?* Not so long ago, it also had a very soft skin and it was embraced in the bosom of its mother. Later, this leg was walking on the green grass. Possibly, many young men wanted to get close to it. With passing time, this leg became dry and hardened, as its owner got older. Finally, it turned into a half-burned and darkened leg, beneath the ash. It would eventually turn into a pile of sand in the Ganges. Let us look carefully one more time at these images and listen to the song by the Ganges River. Although these images are Indian but possibly, they may well be ours.

There was a man who liked to chew betel nuts <sup>15</sup>[15], as well as smoking and drinking. Afterward, he developed a cancerous lesion in his mouth. By the time he came to the hospital for examination, the cancer site already spread to the jaw and penetrated through the cheek. The ulcerous site kept oozing yellow fluid. When he ate or drank, the food would leak out through the hole. Even as he drank his favorite wine, it would still be very painful. When he

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<sup>14</sup>[14] **Ganges River.** This is the most sacred river in India. It is 2510 km (1557 miles) long, flowing east through the eponymous plains of northern India into Bangladesh. It is held sacred by Hindus and is worshipped in its personified form as the goddess Ganga (from Wikipedia)

<sup>15</sup>[15] **Betel nut,** also known as Paaku, Pinang, Areca nut or Cau, is the seed of the Betel Palm (Areca catechu). Betel nuts can be chewed for their effects as a mildly euphoric stimulant, attributed to the presence of relatively high levels of psychoactive alkaloid. Chewing betel nuts is an important and popular cultural activity in many Asian countries. (from Wikipedia)

chewed betel nuts, it would hurt as if he was “*swallowing hot iron pellets.*” His once strong and muscular body got skinnier and skinnier due to his inability to eat or drink. Eventually, we had to put a feeding tube through his nose into the stomach.

His wife expressed remorse and said that they used to quarrel a lot previously. She told me that she cursed him, “*Fine! You keep scolding me, you will get mouth cancer- I curse you to have mouth cancer. Unexpectedly, he really got mouth cancer, and I was the one who suffered the most. Besides taking care of his wounds, I had to go everywhere looking for doctors to treat him, in addition to trying to find money to pay for the treatments. It was miserables beyond description*”. Had she known today’s miseries ahead of time, she would appreciate the good time and tell him, “*When you scold me, I would rather bow to the Buddha one hundred times and transfer the merit and virtue to you. I would invite you to eat good food and would never use evil words to curse you.*”

*Is it better for two people to recite The Buddha’s name together amidst the kind-and-compassionate wisdom light of the Buddha instead of arguing?* Regrettably, we often chose the way that caused pain and miseries to each other. When we are not sick yet, we abuse this body mercilessly. When we get sick, we blame the heaven and the earth. Hopefully, in this life’s very short and temporary union, we should treat each other with compassion and sincerity. Hatred and anger only create a road full of thorns and sufferings for us.

This man really loved fishing. With the betel nuts and wine along with the fishing rod in hand, he excitedly strolled toward the riverbank. Not until he got ulcerous mouth cancer, did he awaken and realize the feelings of the fish when the hook penetrated through its mouth? He spoke with great difficulty because of the ulcerous mouth. When I took care of his wound, he tried to bear the pain and expressed his remorse. He now realized that the fish was suffered by his desire to have a little fun for the moment. The same sufferings of having a punctured mouth now came back to him. When he swallowed food, he felt as if his throat was burning or stabbing with a knife. It was so painful that he wanted to twist his body just as a hooked fish twisted its body trying its best to escape the hook. He taught me an unforgettable lesson. Indeed, “*Cause-and-effect is not off by a penny.*”

There was a poem as following:

*Don’t look down on the weak living beings.*

*Their flesh, skin, and bones are not different from us!*

*Do not shoot the bird on the branch.*

*The young birds in the nest are waiting for their mother.*

There was another person with oral cancer. He went through a series of complex surgeries to remove the cancer cells from the cheek, followed by a transplant of his own skin from the chest area to close the defect of the wound. These complicated operations required lots of endurance.

At night, when I was on my rounds, I could see him staring at the ceiling. It was already late, but he still could not sleep. Outside, the sky was dark and cold. Desperately, he cries in silence. *How are we going to comfort these patients?* He was waiting for the second operation but did not make it to the last one. *Probably, we often postpone doing something, but we may*

*not live until then. Therefore, good things need to be done right away. Let's recite the Buddha's name; let's recite immediately!*

When taking care of patients with oral cancer, I often thought that sometimes I got inner mouth sores. It was already very painful, especially when eating sour or hot food, it would cause burning pain. Far worse was for these people with cancerous mouths. They would shiver in pain even when drinking cold water. When we open our mouth and speak improperly even for a few seconds, we may cause lifelong pain to the listener, and the retribution we would receive is just as painful as people with oral cancer! Although betel nuts and wine can bring you a little enjoyment for the moment, they can also bring unbelievable pain once you fell ill. We ought to be careful since *one second or minute of happiness passes by very quickly; however, one day on the sickbed seems to last a hundred years.*

An automatic door connected examination rooms 1 and 2 of the hospital. One day, I saw a lady in her fifties lying in room 1. She had breast cancer, and she needed a certain kind of drug but her health insurance had not yet agreed to pay for the medicine. Besides dealing with the pain, she needed to find money to defray the medical expenses. She often cried silently for unable to bear such great pressure.

Room 2 at the time had another lady with breast cancer whose was in her thirties. She learnt about the story of the lady in room 1, so she took all the money from her pocket and told me: *"Doctor, please give to the lady in the next room."* She was crying and saying at the same time, *"We both suffer the same misery."* I was deeply moved, and I praised her compassionate Bodhisattva's mind. I knew that her situation was far worse than the lady in room 1. Her children were very young and she had to hire someone to take care of them. Her husband's salary was very low, and there was no medical insurance. All their savings were gone to defray hospital and surgery cost. When she was referred to the hospital for chemotherapy, she was about to let it go and did not want the treatment since she had no money. She just let her destiny ran its own course. However, when she saw the phrase on the wall: *"Even if tomorrow is the last day, tonight I still must plant a garden full with lotus flowers"*, she thought it over and then went to her mom to borrow money and continue with the therapy to maintain her life. She said, *"Life itself is indeed impermanent and there are many painful challenges. Although I have no great ability, I have a little wish that hopefully, I can do my best to help out people in similar circumstances so that they can leave the sufferings and attain happiness."*

I was deeply touched! Both persons had cancer but one was sad and miserable; the other got out of her sufferings to help, to comfort, and to wipe the tears of others. She was able to develop her potential power. While alive, she could plant a lotus flower every day. Gradually, she would get a pond full with fragrant lotus flowers. Think about it. Treating critical illness requires lots of endurance and torment. If we replace the torment with a life of sadness and miseries, *is it very sorry? Why don't we plant "pure lotus flowers" in our inner mind, so that even a smile can be considered as a gift that can bring happiness to us and to others.* There is a saying that, *"Only one single thought of compassion arises, any serious illness is no obstruction!"*

There was a six-year-old boy with lymphatic cancer. Even at that young age, he already endured a lot suffering. Each time his white blood count went up, the doctor had to inject him a drug that had nauseating and vomiting side effects. The boy was at his happiest when his

white blood count went all the way down to such a low level so that doctor could not give any more chemotherapy for fear of life-endangered-infections. Each time he encountered this phenomenon, he was as happy as if he was released from the jail because temporarily, he was “exempted from the torture”. He told me, *“Everyday, besides watching TV is nothing but also watching TV.”* His family was fairly well off so he got his own room in the hospital. He said, *“My aunt is getting married; she invites me to be the bride boy in her wedding. If I can grow up, that would be best. I am not sure if I can grow up?”*

These were the words of a six-year-old boy. Indeed, they caused people who heard them feel sorrowful. On one occasions, he sat in the room waiting for the injection. Before that, he was very happy when he brought his toys along. However, as he got to the door, he recalled the “sufferings are coming, they are about to start” so he lost all interest. Sometimes, he bit his teeth tightly, found a blood vein on the hand himself and said, *“Get the blood here.”* Other times, he was very sad and refused to enter the room. He cried but no sound came out. He only cried softly and the tears bead his eyelash. The first time he came for a blood draw from the ear, he cried for a full two hours. Until now, he had been endured so many times. He realized that crying or spoiling would not help, so he courageously endured. What a pitiful boy! *In life, if we do not want to get old, we have to die young. If we don’t want to die young then we have to get old!*

There was one person in his thirties who had the final stage of nose cancer. Normally, if people die when they are only thirty years old, then perhaps, you will say, it is a short life. However, this lady was only in her thirties, and her family members already could not stand her anymore. Her husband had to take care of her and the children. He kept asking for days off and as a result, he lost his job. The entire household was desperate financially and had to request the Tzu-Chi Foundation 16[16] for help. The Tzu-Chi Foundation agreed to give her a large sum of money to help her with the hospital cost. Her mother had been waiting for too long so she lamented, *“Why is it too long but they have not brought us the money? It is too long!”* I replied, *“People do not owe you money. The money comes from the Foundation’s members who painstakingly save, and compassionately give out to help others. They cannot bear to see you suffer, but it is not that they are rich.”* She heaved a deep sigh! *“Do not worry about money anymore!”* The atmosphere in the family was still very tight. The patient herself also did not feel comfortable to live on. Her mother being exhausted from taking care of her, so she said, *“Why don’t you die soon? You make us suffer with you!”* Her husband having been suffered too much, so he kept asking me, *“How long will she prolong?”* I replied, *“Please do not use the word ‘prolong’, will you?”* Being able to live one day in this life is already very precious. Being together in one day is very rare indeed. If we focus our attention only in the miseries and the darkness in our life, then even without illness, we will still “prolong” our life. If we think optimistically about good things, and even if life is full of obstacles, then it is still worthy to live on. If we cherish life, then living up to thirty years old has twice the longevity of the fifteen years old. Compare with a six years old person, you live five times as long.

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<sup>16[16]</sup> **Tzu-Chi Foundation.** This is a worldwide charitable foundation originated in Taiwan. Tzu Chi means kindness and helping.

*The mind can change destiny.* I had a friend who had bone cancer when she was in her thirties. Totally, she had to go through twenty surgeries. One time, the veins kept bleeding and one leg had to be amputated. Her life was much more difficult than that of the person mentioned above. However, because she knew how to apply Buddha Dharma and used the grateful mind to treat each other, her family lived happier than before she got cancer.

She told me, *“I am very lucky. I lost one leg but I can hear the Buddha Dharma. If not, I don’t know how much bad karma I would commit and subsequently, I have to reap the painful retribution.”* Her husband waited outside the operation room for all these twenty surgeries. *Can you feel his emotion?* He took care of her as that of a Bodhisattva, not complaining the least. After knowing Buddha Dharma, she used the crutch and together with her husband, they cooked and brought foods to patients with similar illness, and advised them to recite the Buddha’s name.

I promised her, *“You memorize the Amitabha Sutra, and then we will go to the mountain together. Both of us can walk and bow to transfer the merits to cancer patients.”* Therefore, her entire family studied the sutra with her. Her son who was still in grade school, told her that: *“If mommy can memorize the Amitabha Sutra without missing a word, I will give you 500 yuans (Taiwan dollars) as a reward.”* She stayed home to do craftwork and to study the Sutra or to recite the Buddha’s name. At night, she recited the sutra for everyone to hear. The day she memorized the entire sutra, she said, *“On that day my entire family has never been happier.”* Including her son’s reward and the money she earned while studying sutra, she had 4000 yuans. She offered the entire amount to the Triple Jewels (The Buddha, The Dharma, and The Sangha). Since she wanted to go to the mountain, each night when her family members were sleeping, she had to practice bowing to the Buddha. You would be almost in tears if you see how she bowed with one leg. Her husband tried to obtain donation to get her an artificial leg. She replied, *“If you can secure donation of 10,000 yuans, then please give me the money. I can donate to others because having one leg is enough.”* She pointed to the crutches and said, *“I am not missing one leg but contrarily, I have one extra leg.”* When she said this sentence, her cancer cells had spread to her lungs, so she needed surgery and chemotherapy one more time. Her face was pinkish and she often had a very bright smile. Many times her smile was brighter than those who are not sick. She said, *“Although we are not rich, but now we are a lot happier than before my leg was amputated.”*

People who recite the Buddha’s name can live in the Pure Land right in this very life. They can live in a happy and peaceful atmosphere of daily life. Like the majority of cancer patients, she also could not avoid financial difficulties. Someone invited her to open a store for children to play electronic games, so she could earn lots of money. She said, *“I want to test my husband, so I bring this idea up to him.”* She was very happy when he said, *“We are people who recite The Buddha’s name. We are afraid our children will get trapped by electronic games, so how can we bear to hurt others’ children?”* I really admired and respected this couple. Although they faced difficulties, they had very superior behaviors. Many families fell into darkness because of financial difficulties. On the contrary, her family was able to turn toward the Buddha since illness. They changed the obstacles into bundles of fragrant flowers. They deserved to serve as models for others.

There was a person with jaw cancer. He had to undergo surgery to remove the cancer cells, and in the process, his lower jaw was removed as well. Doctors had to remove the skin on the chest and used it to cover the lower jaw area. Subsequently, he became a person with no lips. He could not eat but only drink soup or liquid food. He could not sit and eat as a normal person would. Rather, he had to lie down to eat or else the food would come out. Since he had no lips, there was no such thing as “mouth close”.

Just look at these people on how they could do their best to endure and to struggle against illnesses. Many times, *I asked myself why am I luckier than they are.* While suffering as such, but whoever worked hard could overcome the challenges. Although they had different circumstances, attitudes, and ways of looking at things, nevertheless, they all deeply believed in what the Buddha said. When I explained the Buddha’s teaching to the young, many times I had to repeat until my throat turned dry, but they still did not believe. However, with the ones who were suffering in the hospital, I did not have to say anything but ask, *“Is it uncomfortable? Is it painful?”*

They replied, *“Very uncomfortable, very painful.”*

I said, *“The Buddha said the world is a sea of sufferings. Let’s recite Amitabha Buddha, turn our mind toward the light, leave the sufferings and attain bliss.”*

They did not say anymore, but immediately recited Amitabha Buddha. No wonder why there was a saying that *“The Buddhas of the three periods 17[17] and the ten directions treat eight kinds of sufferings as the teacher.”* “Sufferings” is the best teacher, *but why do we wait until then?*

There was another patient with jaw cancer. He was blind and cancer cells already spread to the neck. Yellow fluid kept oozing down from the cheek. His daughter-in-law said, *“At home, I had to spray with countless perfumes but could not get rid of the odor.”* After hearing that, I told her privately, *“I usually see you taking your father-in-law for examination. You are very filial. Taking care of a cancer patient is very hard, but the Buddha said, ‘In eight fields of blessings, taking care of the sick is the best field of blessings.’ If you really take good care of him and make him happy, naturally, your blessings will be measureless. One day we will get old and sick. The way in which we treat our elders, our children will follow our suit and treat us the same. We have to pay close attention. Even a single action, a very casual saying, we need to be compassionate and pitied the patients. Patients do not want to have the odor. Today, one in three or four people will have cancer. If that person is you, then you will have the odor as well. It is not up to them. Therefore, if you have some more tolerance, you will have more blessings.”*

Because of his blindness, he inquired very carefully about his medical conditions: *“What is the real condition of my illness? Doctor, tell me the truth. It does not matter. What I worry most right now is that I still have a son who has not married yet!”* Oh, people indeed have endless afflictions. He had serious illness but not worried about it, instead, he kept worrying about the *“son who has not married!”*

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<sup>17[17]</sup> **Three Periods.** This refers to the past, present, and the future.

When a person is not capable of helping himself, then he has no power nor way to worry for others. If you cannot cross over your own sea of sufferings, then you cannot save others and help them to cross over the sea.

There was one patient with dragon and tiger tattoos on the chest. He probably belonged to some gangs previously. Ever since he contracted mouth cancer, he started to repent sincerely. He said, *"I deserved it."* He had no complaint, but sincerely repented and helped other patients. He tried his best to do good work. After many difficulties, he finally overcame.

I often heard patients complaining, *"In my entire life, I did not do bad things nor hurt anyone. God indeed has no eyes. Why let me have such painful illness?"* This remark makes me think. *Is it really that way? Did we ever do anything evil?* If this is the case, then we are all sages. Look at the Buddha's teaching. Since young until old, we got angry when encountering things not in our way. When we open our mouth, we scolded others. Because of desires for food and drink, we did not care about the baby chicks losing their mothers. We paid no attention to the piglet having a life-and-death separation from its family. We did not tell the truth, did not work hard, argued and not followed our parents' words, etc. There was nothing that was not under control by greed, anger, and ignorance.

People who planted vegetables knew that although the seeds were small but they grew up into big vegetables. When retribution was not here yet, we even dared to talk ill about others. Or, while we were angry, we spoke of harsh words to hurt others. We dared to invite others to eat live seafood. When retribution appeared, we would realize that the sufferings were unbearable and we prayed in order to eradicate our karma.

Venerable Master Guang Qin 18[18] said:

*"[One] must eradicate the roots of the karmic obstacles from the body, mouth, and the mind".*

In other words, when greedy for food, think that the carp, the catfish is also a living being that the Buddhas of the Ten Directions have the love and compassion for. Speaking so, then they are also our siblings. They are someone that the Buddhas have the pity for, and their mothers are waiting for them. When we want to get upset, we have to understand that everything is like a dream. Therefore, do not get angry anymore. If we cannot stand and want to scold others, think that they are living beings that Amitabha Buddha has been waiting for day and night to save and to bring them back to his land. These living beings are also bound by the power of karma, and they have afflictions. Therefore, change our mind to think about the Buddha and recite the Buddha's name. If we can work hard to change ourselves and don't allow our habit of language, behavior, and thoughts to obstruct us, our karma will be eradicated. The sufferings of illness will also be neutralized and lessened by the soft and compassionate mind.

I met a high school teacher who was an extraordinary patient. Each time passing by the hospital beds, I used the studious mind to watch the patients. When this patient was

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<sup>18[18]</sup> **Venerable Guang Qin (1892-1986).** He is an eminent monk of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. A few years after he left home, he cultivated and stayed in a cave on the mountain for 12 years. During this period, people used to call him the 'Conquering Lion Monk' because he tamed the lions living nearby his cave. He used to meditate without eating and sleeping for months. He left China and went to Taiwan in 1947. He cultivated the Buddha Recitation Method, ate one meal a day, sat in meditation and never slept at night.

hospitalized, cancer already spread to the spinal cord and compressed against the nerves so that his two legs could no longer move. After a period of chemotherapy, he could walk reluctantly with the crutches. The toilet was next to the bed but to him, it was quite a distance. He often struggled very hard in order to sit up and to go to the toilet. Although his body was very weak, his eyes were full of spirits. He spoke with great difficulties because of the brain cancer. When sleeping, he could not close the eyes. Later on, his leg bones were broken.

In spite of serious illness, he said, *“Regretfully, I cannot teach anymore!”* (He was a very devoted teacher). He said, *“Having been through this very painful illness allows me to understand more about life and the sufferings of everyone. I will love and take care of my students even more. Regrettably, I don’t have the opportunity anymore!”* I replied, *“You are a much respected teacher. Just look at your aspiration while being sick is enough to tell.”*

On bed, he tried hard to sit up but could only raise his head three inches. Whenever we want to sit up, we can sit up immediately. He struggled so hard until he sweated all over his shirt but he could *“almost”* sitting up. However, he was very happy and said, *“Today I can move quite a distance.”* To me, when he could sit up about 30-40 degrees, he deserved more respect than those long jump athletes in the Olympic. Besides struggling physically, he still aspired to continue teaching and caring for the students.

Ordinary people are healthy and full of spirit daily. However, we often calculate and petty only to bring afflictions upon ourselves. We usually complain about our work. We have the ability and the strength but we do not want to do good work. He was a bedridden patient but aspired to come back to teaching and caring more for the students. Although he could not do so physically, his vast and sincere vow already brought him to the podium forever, and he became the teacher for ten of thousands of people.

There was one person who had final stage of tongue cancer. Cancerous cells from the tongue already spread to the lower jaw. In the beginning, he was healthy enough to stand and to walk by himself. Then, he needed two people to support on two sides in order to walk. Next, he had to sit on wheelchair and finally, he could not move anymore. Yellow fluid kept oozing out from the cancerous sites. Each time I came to change the dressing, he often asked me, *“Why is it getting bigger?”* He could not speak clearly. When I cleaned the wound and changed the dressing, his eyes looked at me as if asking, *“Can I recover? Am I about to die, is it true?”* This fearful mind is the picture of the “life-and-death on the Ganges River.”

When living beings have to confront life and death, every one feels lonely, fearful, terrified. Even a mother in her eighties curled herself into my heart and cried like a baby... One day I went to the sutra lecture and passing by T.H. Street. It was very cold at the time. There was a newly opened shop that sells deer meat. I rode my motorcycle passing by and saw three deers standing shyly in a cage. Their eyes were very familiar to me. They looked like the eyes of the patients who were currently in the hospital, as if they were saying, *“Am I about to die? Please save me quickly. Whatever medicine, whatever method...”* Poor deers! Let us release them! Release them back to the forest! Once their respiration stops, there is no way to make them breath again. I quickly find the shop owner to beg him not to kill them. I turned around and bought the deers to free. When the shop owner heard that we wanted to liberate the deers, he said emotionally, *“I am the one who raises the deer and love them very much, and*

*never would kill them. However, because of financial difficulty, reluctantly today I have to sell them for meat. I am myself also in lots of pain!”*

I was very touch after hearing that. Living beings created karma and received retribution. They all had unwanted sufferings. The truth is that everyone has the Buddha nature. This is also the very reason why Amitabha Buddha is always tolerant, compassionate, and waiting for us to have a single thought of returning to his light. We bought the deers and helped them to take refuge with the Triple Jewels (The Buddha, The Dharma, and The Sangha), and released them to the forest. Hopefully, they would not be captured back. We also prayed for the hunters to bring forth the Bodhi mind (enlightened mind), to meet well conditions to change their occupation, which end the killing karma, so that they would not suffer the evil retribution.

Patients usually put a catfish 19[19] or a carp in a pot under the bed or on the table as supplemental food. When I visited these patients, it seemed like the fishes were struggling. One day I came to the bed of a patient with breast cancer. She was a young Christian of about 27 years old. Can you imagine her sufferings? Her two hands were always cold. There was a fish underneath her bed. I told her:

*“There is someone asking for help underneath your bed?”* She opened her eyes in surprise. Then, I asked her:

*“When you find out that you have this disease, don’t you really hope for someone to save you?”* She nodded, I continued:

*“The fish below your bed knows that it is about to enter a hot pan. Its feeling is similar to your feelings right now. Would you want to act like Jesus Christ to save this fish? The fish is requesting for your help. Can you feel?”*

Her eyes redden (wanting to cry), I added:

*“You bring forth the mind to save them. When you have difficulties or accidents, naturally someone will save you.”* She happily agreed to liberate the fish. Afterward, a dharma friend from Tai Chung Specialty University helped her to liberate the fish....

Many times, I told patients, *“Would you sell me this pot of live fish?”*

Patients usually replied, *“If you want to eat, I will give them to you.”*

I replied, *“I am a vegetarian. I do not eat fish. I want to buy these fishes to liberate and to transfer the merits to you with the hope that you regain your health, recover soon and reunite with your family just like the fish to be released.”*

Normally, patients who had suffered too much or had experiences near the moment of life and death, understood that “their conditions are similar to those of the fish.” They often brought forth the compassionate mind to liberate the fish. The mind to liberate the fish could often give them happy feelings. It encouraged them to love life and to enrich their lives much more than eating the fish itself.

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<sup>19[19]</sup> **Catfish.** In Taiwan, patients can keep a fish for themselves in a cooking pot underneath the hospital beds so they can cook and eat the fish as nutritional supplements.

There was a young man who walked in the city at midnight. He was stabbed in the belly by some bad persons and fell down on the street. Afterward he was taken to the hospital. His wound was so big that his gut fell out. His liver and gallbladder also were injured. At midnight, we had to operate on him. He had no family members to accompany; therefore, we had to take picture of the wound before the surgery just in case if the operation did not go well, we would have some evidences to show that he had injuries previously. (In present society, saving people is also not an easy matter!) This young man just was engaged not so long ago. *You can imagine the confusion and worries of his fiancée when hearing he was wounded? The stuffs inside our belly indeed are nothing nice. The Buddha told us to “contemplate the impurities.”* Let us try to contemplate. If during engagement, just take the picture of the bloody belly wound and show it to the partner, surely very few people is willing to engage with you!

One patient admitted to the hospital for bone treatment. On the upper part of the leg, there was a metal stick inserted through the bone and went all the way through the muscle on the other side. On the lower part of the leg, another metal stick went through in the same style. You can imagine the face and the painful screaming of this patient when the stick was inserted through his bone. *If that person is you, can you still smile? We can try to guess. Do you see where people hanged the roasted birds at the night market? There are about five to ten birds strung together into a bundle and hanged in front of the shop. The painful sufferings we caused to other living beings will come back to our bodies one day. When that happened, we will feel extremely painful, not the least comfortable. However, we often cause sufferings to other living beings indifferently, and treat as if nothing happens. Think about the sufferings of other living beings and the long-term happiness. Everyone, please stop doing that, so we do not “laugh when take the life of an animal, and then lament when enter the hells.”*

There was a person who had uterine cancer who cried each time she saw me. She was divorced and struggled very hard to raise the children herself. The young one just entered primary school when she got this illness. She passed the day with sadness and afflictions. In reality, her illness was almost cured previously. If she had some wisdom in life, then she could have lived happily. People can cure cancer, but the pain in the mind is not curable unless we use our wisdom and listen to the Buddha Dharma. She was treated with chemotherapy and surgery. She only did not invite the Buddha to be the surgeon for her mind; the most effective surgery is the surgery of the mind. Get rid of the roots of affliction. This will stop her from holding on to the big old tree of afflictions daily so that she will not mistakenly thinking that the tree actually holds on to her.

There was an old lady admitted to the hospital with the bandage fully covering her eyes. As I opened the bandage, I felt a sharp pain in my heart! This old lady had a very gentle face. Her eyes were scooped out of the sockets due to cancer. *Do we ever think of using the chopsticks to scoop out the eyes of the fish on the dining table? Let’s try to think about Helen Keller, a great person who was deaf, mute, and blind, wrote like so: “If my eyes can brighten up for only three days, only three days...”* We may run into some circumstances and lose our eyes. *However, when we still have both eyes, we keep looking east, west, and bring afflictions to ourselves? Why do we not look at the compassionated eyes of the Buddha? Why do we not*

*look toward the direction of the Measureless Light?* 20[20] We often use our precious eyes to look at rubbish around, or take others' rubbish and put them into our mind. Over a long period, the entire inner mind is similar to the stinky trash container; we have to be separated from the Bodhisattvas in the Great Pure Sea-like Assembly 21[21]. Please open the eyes of the inner mind. While we can see, [we should] see the niceties of others, and study the strong points of others. Let's feel a little more. Let's look at the "*adorned and majestic eyes as wide as the four oceans of Amitabha Buddha.*" 22[22] Look at the extremely adorned and beautiful sceneries of the Land of Ultimate Bliss and the hearts as vast as the sea of the Bodhisattvas.

There was one person with esophageal cancer. Breathing was very difficult for her. She got two tubes: one from the nose to the lung to help with respiration and the other into the stomach for feeding. Sometimes, she tried very hard in order to cough. With each cough, the pain was so intense with each cough as if her liver and guts were tearing apart. Her entire body shivered with pain. Her husband could not stand to see, so he ran out to the balcony to cry. Sometimes I went to the market, I saw chicken hanging on the meat counter; these chickens were so pitiful. Each chicken's neck was drilled a hole so that it could be hanged, and very few people pitied their pains. However, if the person got the breathing tube in the nose was your wife, children, or your mother, and then you would be in intense pain when they coughed or breathed out.

There was a butcher who had lung cancer for a while and passed away. I heard the story from his wife and children that when he came home, he was unconscious for few days. However, he kept screaming and yelling:

*"Quickly take the pig livers hanging on the wall away."* Or,

*"Quickly take the pig's head away."*

He kept screaming like that day-and-night for a few consecutive days. Everyone in the family was terrified until their hairs stood on end, but they did not understand what he was talking about. The appearances when he passed away were very frightening. He endured a lot of suffering. From that point on, his family members realized the cause-and-effects of the killings. While he was in the hospital, I advised his family to recite the Buddha's name. But they replied that while they are in sadness and suffering, how could they recite? Although Amitabha Buddha has the great kindness and compassion to take people who can recite The Buddha's name ten times at the time of death to the Land of Ultimate Bliss, it is still very hard to recite even when we are healthy because we are confused by worldly emotions and desires. Much less so is the time of death when the pains of illness are torturing us!

Let us hope that other people will hear and see this patient's manifestation. May they understand so they can avoid similar sufferings? Hopefully, the merits of this person from warning other living beings will help him to leave the sufferings and to receive by the Buddha. The living beings that were butchered by him will rely on the sweet dew of the Buddha Dharma

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<sup>20[20]</sup> *Measureless Lights*. This also refers to Amitabha Buddha. See notes 1 and 11

<sup>21[21]</sup> *The Great Pure Sea-like Assembly*. This refers to the innumerable and incalculable numbers of sagely residents of the Western Pure Land (also called the Land of Ultimate Bliss). There are so many of them so that the assembly is referred collectively as the Sea-like Assembly.

<sup>22[22]</sup> *Adorned majestic eyes as wide as the four oceans*. This phrase refers to the verses that praise the adornments of Amitabha Buddha, his physical characteristics.

to untangle the karmic knots in their heart and jointly recite the Amitabha Buddha, jointly reborn to the Western Pure Land.

Healthy people often complain of not having enough sleep. In the hospital, there were so many tears, so much prolonged suffering! People, who were not destined to die yet, lay flat on a bed and complained that the alarm clock was too noisy. People, who met their destiny, fought and struggled with life and death throughout the night.

There was a person with cancer of the lower jaw that already metastasized to the throat. He could not swallow anymore; his breathing was also difficult. Doctors had to drill a hole in his abdomen to insert a feeding tube into the stomach and another hole in the neck to help the respiration. We can eat and drink without the feeding tube or breathing tube; that is quite precious, truly appreciative! A few days before his passing, we could say that he bled some blood everyday. Once every two to three days he would bleed more blood. Blood came out from the mouth and the nose, from the breathing tube. Nurses and resident doctors really wanted to save him, but they could only stand on the side to hold a basin to catch his blood. Then they had to transfuse blood for him because his blood came out from the areas where they could not stop. One time his blood stained my body. His eyes reddened and swelled up in a very frightening way. The whole night we were at his side to take care of him and to catch his blood. In the morning, I still had to see patients, so I requested a friend to bring me a dress. I could change mine dress, but he could not change his! Do you know that each time he moved, there would be more bleeding? We had to transfuse blood continuously to him, but we still could not keep up with the blood coming out from his body. No medicine worked. His body kept bleeding and tortured him all day and night. *People wanted to close their eyes peacefully, but it was not that simple!*

From that day on, I understood some more about the life and death matter. The reflecting image in the Ganges River could very well be my own shadow.

A sixteen-year-old boy was in the top of his class. He had brain cancer and went through four brain surgeries, three of which were in the same year. This time he was hospitalized to receive chemotherapy. His skull bone was cut a portion, therefore his head had a depression. Fortunately, he was still alive and had the chance to hear the Buddha Dharma. One day, I received a thankful postcard from his dad. In the card, his father mentioned that he requested him write to me hoping I would please send him a Buddha statue, so he can pay respect to. The father was very formal and afraid to bother me, as if he was very reluctant to request for the Buddha statue. I was moved into tears and immediately, I went and got an Amitabha Buddha statue for his son. He lived in Fung Yuen. I was too busy so I requested a nurse to bring it to him. The nurse told me later that when she just arrived, the boy immediately sat up. He walked wobbly, since half of his body was nearly unmovable. However, he was very excited and vigorously bowed to the Buddha. Seeing that, the nurse was moved and said: *“My four limbs are well but I never wanted to bow to the Buddha previously. Seeing the boy’s sincerity and gathering all his might to bow to the Buddha makes me feel very embarrassed.”*

When people are healthy and can move around well, they think it is normal. They do not appreciate it. The healthy body does not last long. Earlier, we mentioned that people could lose their mouth, throat, even the brain. Today while we still have the mouth, we should learn

to speak nicely and harmoniously, to encourage and to support each other to recite the ten-thousand-merits holy phrase “*Amitabha Buddha.*” We do not know when we may lose our brain. Today, we should spend time to think about the lights and the compassion of the Buddha.

*Amitabha Buddha. Amitabha Buddha.*

When I was a first year medical resident, I was on call in the emergency room one night. At midnight, we got a patient who got clots in the heart vessels. Respiration already stopped, and the patient was in a coma. His face and tongue turned dark purple. EKG 23<sup>[23]</sup> and blood test results indicated that his heart had been severely damaged. According to the physician-in-charge’s experiences, even for people with less severe conditions, it was still not curable, much less was in this case. Therefore, we have to tell the family members of this patient to “prepare mentally.” I just followed my daily routine of reciting the Buddha’s name and taking care of the patient at the same time. After using many kinds of medicines, we still could not measure his blood pressure. He was still in a coma and unable to breath by himself. His wife was deeply hurt and told me:

*“People said that God loves and helps good people. But why God does not love me? Doctor, please try all means to save him, even if he will turn into a ‘vegetative person’, I am still willing to take care of him.”*

Feeling that she was very nice and honest, so I advised her:

*“When people encounter major calamity, they need to make great vow to recite The Buddha’s name and then hopefully, they can overcome.”*

She asked, *“How do we make great vows?”*

I replied, *“Use your utmost sincerity to make great vows.”*

She immediately said, *“From now on, both of us will become vegetarian and recite The Buddha’s name. He is a teacher, so he can propagate the Buddha Dharma when he recovers from illness.”*

I gave her and the children each a recitation bead and told them: *“Tonight even all of you waiting anxiously in the ER will not help. It’s better off to keep your worried mind at ease to recite ten thousands Amitabha Buddha’s names and request for the Buddha’s help. The Buddha’s power is inconceivable. We will do our best to save him. All of you recite the Buddha’s name on his behalf. If his lifespan is meant to end, then he can reborn in the Land of Ultimate Bliss.”* That night three of us physicians kept looking at the EKG, blood pressure monitor, adjusting medication doses from 7 PM to 3 AM. One of the three physicians lamented that, *“We three stay up all night to take care of one person, but we still could not measure the blood pressure!”* (Meaning that this patient could not breathe by himself without the help of the breathing machine.) Strangely, about 4 or 5 AM his blood pressure gradually increased, and he slowly woke up. Immediately, I notified his family members. I was deeply moved

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<sup>23</sup>[23] *An electrocardiogram* – abbreviated, as EKG or ECG – is a test that measures the electrical activity of the heartbeat. With each beat, an electrical impulse (or “wave”) travels through the heart. This wave causes the muscle to squeeze and pump blood from the heart. (According to the American Heart Association).

when I opened the door and saw his family members sitting in a line reciting Buddha's name faithfully. His son wrote on a piece of paper, "*Dad, I really want to see your kind eyes.*"

A young man came to visit him and wept tearfully, I thought this young man is his son. The young man said, "*He is my teacher. Previously, he lived in a shabby house and spent all his salary to support us students. If it is not for him, I will not have today. Doctor, please save him.*" He cried again before finished talking. Afterward, I learned that this patient was selected as one of the "*ten teachers who have the greatest love for students.*" After regaining consciousness, he had to continue using the artificial respirator for three more days. He started to recite the Buddha's name during this time. Besides heart attack, he also had lung disease. Finally, he did recover and walked out of the hospital by himself. Afterward, he returned to the hospital to find me and collaborate in printing sutra. Those doctors who reviewed his EKG and blood test results felt unbelievable when they saw his health gradually improving.

There was a very beautiful girl who used to be the pageant of her school previously. Her face had cancer and swelled up to about the size of three heads clustered in one place. When I first saw her, I felt as if there was a child sitting on her head. Although she had to endure this big suffering, but I thought, she was still lucky. During this painful time, she learned about the Buddha Dharma. She lamented, "*Regrettably, I hear the Buddha Dharma too late!*" However, if we can bring forth our mind soon, it is not that late. In these painful circumstances, others would have lamented to Heaven and Earth. On the contrary, she was able to recite the Buddha's name. She turned the sufferings into sweet dews of compassion. She changed the sadness and sorrows into a cool refreshing light. Her heart relied on Amitabha Buddha. She gave all her personal property to make offerings to everyone and to remind them about the great matter of death. Many Dharma Masters 24[24] and Lotus Friends 25[25] were moved, and they compassionately recited the Buddha's name for her. One day, she gave me \$500 and asked me to buy flower seeds either to plant in the temple or in front of Pure Karma Pure Abode Buddha Recitation Hall. She said when the flowers blooming, we could offer them to the Buddha. There would always be blooming flowers to offer to the Buddha.

We are healthy people but no one has the mind as beautiful as hers. Perhaps you will say her face is very ugly, not as pretty as before. However, think about it, *do we have the mind as beautiful as hers?* She handed to me her most precious necklace that her mother gave her previously and said, "*Doctor, please sell this necklace and use this money to print sutra, to make offerings to the Triple Jewels, or to do whatever as long as it benefits living beings.*" This is truly rare. While she suffered tremendous pain, but she still had such a beautiful mind. *Can you not feel the power of the Buddha Dharma?* Many people visited her. She said, "*I got this illness because of bad karma 26[26] [that I committed previously]. All of you who come to visit me, please don't do evil things; just do the good deeds. Always remember so. You must prepare for your future. Quickly recite The Buddha's name so that you don't waste your trip to visit me this time.*"

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<sup>24</sup>[24] **Dharma Masters.** This is a formal reference to the Buddhist monks or nuns.

<sup>25</sup>[25] **Lotus Friends.** This refers to people who practice to recite the Buddha's name. Usually, they go to a Buddhist association or temple to recite together and help each other.

<sup>26</sup>[26] **Karma.** This is a Buddhist term refers to "deeds" or "what is done." It can be good or evil or neutral. It can be created by the body, the mouth, or the mind. (Buddhist Text Translation Society of the City of Ten Thousand Buddhas, 4951 Bodhi Way, Ukiah, CA 95482. Tel. 707-462-0939).

There was an eighty years old man with lung cancer who came from a nursing home. He said, when he was five years old, he lost his dad, and eight years old, he lost his mom. He lived lonely until he's eighty years old. We could say that he experienced all kinds of happiness, sadness, separation, and union in life. Now he was old and developed severe illness, and he had to lie in bed all day long. One night he sat up holding his pillow and talked to himself: "*I want to go back, I want to go back*". His voice was deeply sad. However, when standing up, he could not maintain the balance, so he fell down and injured himself. His teeth had lots of tartar. Each day, the nurse spent a lot of time to convince him to brush his teeth. He persistently refused and said, "*For a person who wants to die, what is brushing for?*" For nearly two months, he was not willing to eat anything; therefore, he almost died out of starvation. With great difficulties I managed to place the food and medicine in his mouth, but he consistently refused to swallow and decisively chose to die. Afterward, he could no longer control his urination and defecation. He had to urinate and to defecate right in bed. He had no family. There were not enough nurses in the hospital. No one stayed there to change the sheet or his clothes. Afterward, he did not have the strength to dress, and he also refused to change. He only had a skinny and bony body left lying on bed. We could only inject medicine since he refused to eat. His hand was full of needle wounds for injecting medicine or taking blood.

This was the suffering of old age. I advised him to recite the Buddha's name, but he could hardly do it. Each time seeing him, there was no pen that could describe all the heart-broken pains and suffering. He had been healthy like us at one time. He had been walking quickly and crossing mountain and rivers. Just like us, he looked for food when hungry and smiled as bright as the blooming flowers. The life-and-death waves of the Ganges River neither stop for even one minute, nor one second. Our body is just like a house that can ruin and fall down. Living in an old and shabby house that is wet when rain is indeed very hard, very difficult. At that time, if we recite the Buddha's name and place our mind to reside at the Western Pure Land 27[27], a land with freedom and self-mastery, solid and pure, we can move whenever we want then we will have a very adorned and nice place. If you are just sad and sorrowful to accompany the old house, the concern is that in the future you will move into another house that is even older and shabbier than the current one, and suffer life after life!

There was one old patient, someone said he is eighty years old; others said he is ninety years old. It seemed like he was a professor of Beijing University previously. His face appeared intellectual. He was not a patient in my specialty. When I first saw him, he was already in a coma. Each time I entered his room, I could only whisper '*Amitabha Buddha, Amitabha Buddha*' into his ears. For two months or so, he showed no reaction. Finally, he regained consciousness and had some reactions. He looked at me and tried all his might as if wanting to recite "*Amitabha Buddha*", but he had no strength to utter the sound. His hands appeared to clasp together. Clasp hands is very easy with healthy people, but it was extremely difficult for him. *Was his skin not soft and pink when he was young?* However, the world is impermanent; good looking, healthy, and young people will gradually turn into weak, old, and humpbacked people.

It seems like I take the images of old people and pull them down to the bottom of a deep pit, *is that too cruel?* However, if I do not describe clearly so, then everyone will not

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<sup>27[27]</sup> *Western Pure Land*. See note 1.

understand the reality of life and do not let go. Thus, we cannot attain self-mastery happiness. If we do not turn our head and recite the Buddha's name soon, we will regret forever for the future kalpas 28[28] to come.

For the majority of people who are about to die, respiration becomes very difficult. If they are in the hospital, the doctors will insert an oxygen tube into the mouth or nose to maintain respiration. When respiration problems become serious, then they will be transferred into rooms that have permanent nurse staffing to look after them. Sometimes, a nose mask is used to help patient to breath. All over the body wherever a tube can be inserted, a tube will be put in. For example, urinary line has a tube inserted to collect urine. The mouth has a tube to put in to feed food into the stomach. The nose has a tube to place into the lung. Only one thing is missing. There is no tube to conduct the light of Amitabha Buddha into people's inner mind. An intensive care unit is similar to hell on earth. Perhaps these modern equipments had saved many people; but to the patients, this is a very fearful hell regardless of whether or not they can recover. No one likes to enter it one more time.

Previously when reciting the Earth Store Sutra 29[29], I often thought that the Buddhas and the Bodhisattvas 30[30] concerned that living beings may commit evil deeds, so they purposely said that in order to threaten living beings; [I thought] there was no such thing as the Burning Hell, the Tongue-Ripping Hell 31[31]. It seemed that all kinds of terrifying sufferings were only to threaten people. Until I entered the hospital, I realized that every sentence the Buddha said was so truthful, and I also understood why in the Sutra, Buddha had many times, recommended and requested Earth Store Bodhisattva 32[32]: *"Do not let living beings fall into evil paths [even if] for one day and one night." Must tell clearly so for living beings to know about the painful sufferings in the cycle of cause-and-effect. Do not let living beings fall into the evil paths and suffer painfully for even a day and a night."* However, *do we pay attention and understand the compassion of the Buddha?*

Patients called me at midnight when I was very tired and sleepy, but I still had to wake up to see them, to take care, to provide medicine, or therapy for them. When I saw living beings endured the sufferings on the verge of life and death, the sentences in the Sutra of the

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<sup>28[28]</sup> **Kalpa.** A kalpa is a Sanscrit (ancient East Indian language) word refers to an eon or a long period in Buddhist terminology. (Wikipedia).

<sup>29[29]</sup> **Earth Store Sutra** is a Buddhist Sutra in which The Buddha taught about the past vows and the inconceivable powers of a Bodhisattva named Earth Store. This Bodhisattva vowed to go to hells and save the living beings there. He is well known among Buddhist for filiality and for his deep vows. Among all the Bodhisattvas, he is foremost in vows. He is famous for saying, *"Unless the hells are empty, I shall not become a Buddha. And, until I save all living beings, I will not attain Bodhi (Buddhahood)."*

<sup>30[30]</sup> **Bodhisattva.** This is a Buddhist term refers to one who is self-enlightened and seeks to enlighten others. He or she can work toward enlightenment and at the same time helps others to attain enlightenment.

<sup>31[31]</sup> **Burning Hells, Tongue-Ripping Hells.** These are some of the hells described in the Buddhist Earth Store Sutra. See note 30 for more.

<sup>32[32]</sup> **Earth Store (Kstigarbha) Bodhisattva:** "Earth" symbolizes for our mind. "Store" is symbolic for Treasure; combining the two names together, it means the treasure in our mind is innumerable. Innumerable virtue and intelligence are in our self-nature. **Kstigarbha**, known by the Japanese name **Jizō** or the Mandarin Chinese name **Dizang**, is a popular Mahayana Buddhist Bodhisattva, usually depicted as a Buddhist monk in the orient. The name **Jizō** or **Dizang** may be translated as "Earth Treasury", "Earth Store", "Earth Matrix", or "Earth Womb." It is derived from shortening of Chinese script reading of Sanskrit word *ksiti* (earth) and *garbha* (womb, matrix).

Kitigarbha is often referred to, because of his vow not to achieve Buddhahood until all hells are emptied, as the Bodhisattva of the hell beings. His famous vow recited by many Buddhists is *"Not until the hells are emptied will I become a Buddha; not until all beings are saved will I certify to Bodhi."*

Eight Great Human Enlightenments 33[33] quickly appeared in my mind: “*Life-death is burning; afflictions are endless; bring forth the Great Vehicle 34[34] mind; save all living beings; vow to endure endless sufferings on behalf of living beings; enable living beings to attain complete happiness.*” Once you saw the suffering scenes, then if somebody asked you to endure on behalf of living beings, *could you do it?* Let us ask about the sufferings mentioned previously, *can you endure for one night on the patient’s behalf?* I do not say to ‘substitute’, that is too difficult. Only standing aside to take care and to comfort patient continuously for a few nights without sleep, for both day and night is already too difficult (normally you will feel that your head is heavy, your heart will beat faster than before...).

Cultivation in Buddhism besides compassion, we also need to have solid faith, great vow power, and diligent recitation of The Buddha’s name in order to have the ability to transcend the revolving six paths full of life-and-death sufferings. In reality, we do not say to ‘substitute’ or to endure the sufferings; just to ‘hear’ [is enough]. Sitting all day from morning to night, you hear people lamented, “*How much I suffered?*”... “*I have endless sufferings at home*”. Let you listen twenty-four hours a day consecutively for a few days, then you will understand. After I ‘listened’ for a while, one time when I was reciting “Homage to the Great Kind and Great Compassionate Guan Shi Yin Bodhisattva”, I heard someone else was also reciting “Homage to the Great Kind and Great Compassionate Guan Shi Yin Bodhisattva.” After hearing this sentence, I was moved into tears unknowingly.

Exactly, do not say you will substitute for living beings and endure endless sufferings on their behalf. Just ‘listen’ to the sufferings is enough to know the unbounded kindness and compassion of the Bodhisattva. He vowed to “listen to the sufferings in the world.” Wherever there are people in suffering, he will immediately come and rescue them. We keep our mind at ease to recite the Bodhisattva’s name. From one Bodhisattva’s holy name, we know the unlimited kindness and compassion of the Bodhisattvas, of their inconceivably vast minds.

When both my eyes saw the sadness, the fear, the terror of the near death person, and when my two ears heard the innumerable cries of separation at life and death, I turned back to recite the “Endless Light and Endless Longevity of Amitabha Buddha.” Naturally, my eyes were tearful, and I could feel the compassion, the kindness, and the unbounded closeness contained in the holy name of Amitabha Buddha. Indeed, Amitabha Buddha had long known about the darkness, the sadness and the fear in the life and death cycle of ordinary living beings like us. He is emitting endless light everywhere to save and to comfort living beings untiringly. He never rests nor takes ‘vacation’. Day and night, his forever vow is unceasingly to help living beings in the sea of life and death. He brings the cool and refreshing states 35[35] in the Land of Ultimate Bliss and gives them away to living beings. *Do you pay attention to the fact*

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<sup>33</sup>[33] *Sutra of the Eight Great Human Enlightenments*: The Buddha taught about eight great important principles for mankind in this Sutra.

<sup>34</sup>[34] *Great Vehicle* (Mahā-yāna), one of the two great schools of Buddhism. Its name implies its ability to liberate a great number of people and indeed expresses the intention to liberate all beings. In Mahā-yāna, the Buddha nature that is immanent in all beings becomes more important than the person of the historical Buddha. The fundamental principles of Mahayana doctrine were based around the possibility of universal liberation from suffering for all beings (hence "great vehicle") and the existence of Buddhas and Bodhisattva embodying transcendent Buddha-nature (the eternal Buddha essence present, but hidden and unrecognized, in all beings). Mahayana traditions also consider that attainment of the level of an arhat is not final.

<sup>35</sup>[35] *Cool and refreshing states*. This phrase usually refers to the states or sceneries of the Western Pure Land (Land of Ultimate Bliss).

*that it can rain consecutively for a few days, but the sun is not disappeared?* Measureless Lights and Endless Longevity<sup>36</sup>[36] are the sources of eternal compassion and kindness. They shine endlessly and cause no feeling of insecurity because the lights are never lost. There are no sufferings of life and death separation.

There were late nights in which sleeping pills and pain pills did not work anymore. I often stayed beside patients' beds to help them reciting the Buddha's name (realistically, I had to say that the 'Bodhisattva patients' helped me to recite the Buddha's name, because without them, I would not be so diligent to get up at midnight to recite the Buddha's name). Mixing together with the respirations and the recitations of the patients, I recited and listened to each sentence, each sound peacefully. When medicines were no longer effective, extremely sincere praying to Amitabha Buddha for help had the best efficacy. It could comfort both the painful sufferings of the body and the mind of the patient. Listening to one sound immediately relieved one from sufferings. If peacefully listening to every word, every single word, then the sufferings in each minute would disappear just as fog would disappear when the sun rose. Amitabha Buddha is similar to an electric company that supplies electricity at no cost. As long as you do not unplug the cord, then you will receive an endless source of energy.

There was a person with nose cancer. Here, I want to introduce this person because there is a special meaning. This person's cancer had metastasized far out until she had difficulty breathing; only by then she was admitted to the hospital and her illness was extremely painful. For a brief time before her passing, she vowed to be vegetarian. She pulled my hand and said, *"Doctor, if I have no hope for curing, please pray for me to quickly reborn to the Land of Amitabha Buddha."* She was transferred from another hospital to our hospital for chemotherapy. Nose cancer has a very high success rate of curing. It only needs to be diagnosed and received therapy early, and then it is curable. However, her case was diagnosed too late. At midnight, she experienced difficulty breathing, so people took her to our hospital for help. It was too late. That night I was not in the hospital. The following morning when I came, she already stopped breathing for a while, and she was considered dead. Her family members prepared for her to be discharged. For some unknown reasons, the nurse at the emergency room called me using the hospital speaker system. When I saw her, I was very sad. I whispered into her ear:

*"In your short life, you had been suffered too much pains. Your children are still young, but your husband will take care of them. Even if you want to do these things, you cannot. Now, you must let go of everything. You should recite Amitabha Buddha with me, and go with him to reborn in the Western Land of Ultimate Bliss."*

I was at her bedside reciting the Buddha's name and requested the Buddha compassionately received her. At the time, I felt very clearly that each recitation originated from the bottom of my heart. Strangely, her tears kept flowing. Afterward, I invited the nurses in the ER (emergency room) to look at her and I told them:

*"Medically speaking, we declared that she was dead. Her breathing stopped. There was neither heartbeat nor blood pressure, none whatsoever. However, Buddhists said because dead people still have attachments, their consciousness has not completely left the bodies. On*

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<sup>36</sup>[36] *Measureless and Endless Longevity* usually refers to the Amitabha Buddha or the Pure Land. See notes 1 and 11.

*average, we have to wait for eight hours for the consciousness to leave the bodies. Therefore, we have to take good care of the near death people or people who just die.”*

However, nowadays when people passed away in the hospital, we could not keep their bodies without moving for the most part. This is very sad.

As Buddhists, we have to pay close attention. The time of passing away is extremely important. When people are about to die, the four elements start to dissemble resulting in extreme pains. Their consciousness is about to leave the bodies. The pain is similar to that of the cold flesh-cutting wind or to that of pulling the shell off from the turtle. *Absolutely, at that time do not touch the dead body. We must remind and help them to recite The Buddha’s name, help them to have the proper thought of reborn in the Land of Ultimate Bliss.* If they cannot be reborn, they will reincarnate according to their karma. Life after life, kalpa after kalpa they will get lost in the revolving six paths. The painful sufferings of birth, age, sick, and death will repeat themselves forever. Regardless of whether you are a king or a president, you cannot escape. Intelligence cannot match the power of karma. Wealthy ones also cannot escape reincarnation.

*Again, please remind everyone that, if you encounter such circumstances later on, then must pay attention: the time of passing away and 8 hours after breathing stops, we must single-mindedly recite The Buddha’s name. If your faith and vow are solid and sincere, the kind and compassionate Amitabha Buddha will definitely receive you. During this time (within 8 hours), neither move nor touch the dead body. Do not do anything that will touch or move the body (including moving the bed the person is laying).*

If you ever fell seriously sick, you would know that the body is extremely weak and painful. A little movement to turn the body or to get dressed is enough to make the sick people very painful. The body and the mind are hardly peaceful. Majority of people think that reciting Buddha’s name is to send the dead away. In reality, Amitabha Buddha has measureless lights and endless longevity. Reciting the Buddha’s name for seriously ill people is to connect their painful and confusing mind with the measureless lights of the Buddha (also refreshing the measureless lights and longevity in everyone’s self nature). If your lifespan is not over yet, then we can recite the Buddha’s name and rely on the Buddha’s power to eradicate disasters and to increase lifespan. Many patients let go of everything, and single-mindedly recite the Buddha’s name. They recover despite severe illness. If your lifespan is over, then by reciting the Buddha’s name, the Buddha will receive you back to the Land of Ultimate Bliss for ‘studying abroad’. You will have comfort and peace. In the hospital, I had seen many patients admitted to the ER, but they did not recover. Doctors declared they are dead. A few hours later, their family members came from far away. Naturally, the dead oozed blood from their nose or shed tears. These stories make me to believe more in the teaching of the wise ancients that *‘Do not touch nor move the body of the dead within eight hours after breathing ceased. Wholeheartedly, reciting the Buddha’s name for the dead to help them.’* Hence, everyone please do not overlook this matter and make uncorrectable errors.

There is one patient who was a pig butcher. Everyday, he treated everyone very kindly. Butchering pig was an occupation passing down from his parents. He said, *“We could not change occupation and also did not know that we should change to a different one.”* When he was young, someone taught him to recite Amitabha Buddha. Since then, every time he saw the

Buddha statue, he would put hands together and recite three times ‘*Amitabha Buddha*’. Most valuable of all, he said he did not recite for him, but only hope that the Buddha would protect and support all living beings. He said, “*How could the Buddha only protect and support me?*” This was a very proper attitude. Although he had been in the business for a long time, his mind was very nice and gentle. He did not know that killing pigs is hurting living beings and must receive bad retributions. He had cancer of the lower jaw. After a while, it metastasized to the entire esophagus. Even with therapy, the cancer kept remitting. Each night, he lied on bed and moaned. He breathed with great difficulties, similar to the sounds of the saw in action. The mouth had mucus, but he could neither spit out nor swallow. The throat felt as if being strangled, so that he experienced severe pain with each deep breath. He said during this time, he realized the painful sufferings of the butchered pigs; he repented wholeheartedly. He could not eat and had to use a tube (inserted into the mouth to feed liquid food).

In principles, he understood clearly and brought forth the mind to recite the Buddha’s name to reborn to the Pure Land. His face was different from other patients. He often did not feel sorrowful. He said, “*Doctor, please check my body to see if any organ is still usable? Can I donate my eyes to others? Is my heart still good? Can I donate it to others? If I can donate, I would do so because sacrificing just me is not that important. If I can make others happy, that is really valuable.*”

I replied, “*Your heart is really similar to the hearts of the Bodhisattvas. The life of each person can serve as mirror for others. Only one person can use your eyes. The person who has this pair of eyes will see everything. However, after seeing, we do not know if this person will be “happy” or “angry”. If using this pair of eyes to look at things that make him or her angry, then it is very unfortunate. The person who has received the pair of flesh eyes might not necessarily happy. If this person does not know how to use, then even a heart transplant will not make him happy if he does not understand the true principles.*”

My idea is not to oppose people to have organ transplant. However, people who can endure the pains during surgeries and have no angry nor regretful thoughts, they must have a very great “way power” 37[37]. *Moreover, although the cancer patient has a good heart to donate his organ while he is still alive, but would the recipients be mindful that they might develop cancer?* He had such a good heart that is very valuable. I could not stop him. I only told him, “*Now you should urgently recite the Buddha’s name, so you can be reborn in the Western Land of Ultimate Bliss. Afterward, following your vows to come back and to save living beings; you only need to recite the Buddha’s name vigorously until the last minute so you can step on the lotus pedestal. You will be a good model for many people and make them understand the supreme wonders of the Land of Ultimate Bliss.*” He told me that he did this business throughout his life, initially because of financial pressure in his family. If he were not a butcher, there would be no money to live on. Afterward, counting all the money he earned by this profession was not enough to pay for hospital. Contrarily, he even owed money. Life was even harder.

People often allege that, “*They have no choice not to do so*”. Although they realize that doing so is not in line with the Buddha Dharma, but they still continue. Until one day, they figure that they “cannot do that anymore.” They turn their head to look back only to find that

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<sup>37[37]</sup> **Way Power.** It is also call *dharma power*. In Buddhist context, this usually refers to one’s cultivation skill or level

they do not earn much. Eventually, they fall ill and endure painful sufferings. They have to pay a very expensive price that is not really worth it. During his hospitalization, some lotus friends visited and introduced the Buddha Dharma to him and recited the Buddha's name for him. After returning home and a few days before he passed away, he told his family members to look for the lotus friends and requested them to continue to help him with recitation. A few people at Medicine King Study Society and the lady owner of my rental place also came to recite for him. I heard that he smiled and recited the Buddha's name as he passed away. The more they recited the Buddha's name, the brighter his smile. Afterward, they told me: *"We helped to recite for him. He smiled and looked at us. After eight hours, he was still smiling and looking at us."*

There is a poetic phrase that says:

*'Unwilling to return, but if wanting, you will get back immediately.*

*Who will compete for the wind and the moon in your homeland?'*

His smiling when "going back to the homeland" was indeed a comfort and encouragement for people who are still struggling on the verge of life-and-death. His final smile was extremely rare and valuable.

The stories above are all the reflections of the Ganges River. All these images of the 'Life-and-Death' River caused Shakyamuni Buddha 38[38] a severe headache. He saw the images of birth, age, sick, death, and he thought of a way to help living beings to leave the sea of life-death sufferings. After a period of perseverance and hard cultivation beneath the Bodhi Tree 39[39], he attained enlightenment and understood thoroughly all the principles of mankind and the universe. He started to turn the Dharma Wheel at Deer Park Garden and taught the Four Noble Truths (Suffering, Accumulation, Extinction, The Way) for the first five Bhikhus 40[40] (Qiao Chen Ru's group) 41[41]. He explained to them "mankind" has what kinds of sufferings, the causes of sufferings, the methods to leave sufferings, and what it will be like after leaving sufferings. I think this is the perfect medical lecture in the history of mankind. The Buddha is the greatest medical doctor. He taught us the method to get rid of the sufferings forever. Like a beam of light that illuminates in the long dark night, enlightenment is an extremely beautiful road, the road to go back to the homeland, to return to the pure Buddha nature inherently presents in each and every one of us. Everyday, Shakyamuni Buddha calls on us to return to our homeland quickly. He wants us to unravel all the binding afflictions, so we can attain perfect peace.

*Would you like to follow the Buddha back to the homeland?* Many people followed the Buddha and attained enlightenment. Everybody, please look at the picture of Venerable Master

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<sup>38[38]</sup> **Shakyamuni Buddha.** This is the official name of the Buddha, the founder of Buddhism in India over 2500 years ago. He is the teaching host of our present world, which is called the Saha World.

<sup>39[39]</sup> **Bodhi Tree.** This is a kind of giant tropical tree in India that the Buddha sat under its shade, meditated for 49 days, and attained complete enlightenment.

<sup>40[40]</sup> **Bhikhus.** This refers to Buddhist monks who received the 250 precepts.

<sup>41[41]</sup> **Qiao Chen Ru's (Kaundinya) Group** refers to the first group of the sagely disciples that the Buddha taught after enlightenment. There are five people in this group. All of them attained enlightenment after hearing the Buddha's teaching on the Four Noble Truths.

Hsu Yun 42[42]. Just look at his facial expression, just look at his extraordinary charisma and do not need to read his autobiography, we still can feel how vast his heart is in order to have such charisma. One Dharma master told me that when his own master was just 36 years old, the Venerable Master was 106 years old. The two of them were about to cross a river by using a bridge built from two bamboo trees. The young monk dared not to cross, so the Venerable Master grabbed his collar, lifted him up, and carried him over the river. While the young monk's two feet were still dangling back and forth out of fear, the Venerable Master did not even blink once, but carry him across the bridge. You can read this entire story from the autobiography [of Master Hsu Yun]; hence, we only need to tell some portion of it. Everyone can think from here. Look at people who have followed the footsteps of the Buddha. How do they do it, but they are able to *“live as beautiful as the summer flowers and die as beautiful as the autumn moon?”* While alive, they live as beautiful as the summer flowers and when they die, it is just as beautiful as the full autumn moon shining everywhere.

Another Venerable with great merits nearest to our time is Venerable Master Guang Qin. Everyone praised him as the “precious jewel” in Buddhism. Here is the picture of him when he was 95 years old. Two days before rebirth, his eyes brightened up sharply. When the Venerable Master was 92 years old, I had the opportunity to follow him up to the mountain. He walked in front solidly and quickly. I was exhausted trying to catch up with him. At the time, Cheng Tian Temple was not completed yet. When passing a road that had many obstacles, I almost fell down. He turned his head and said, *“You have to walk carefully!”* His voice was husky but powerful; his eyes were stern, but contained boundless compassion. I was so embarrassed. Now on the road of my life, I had fallen many times and had encountered many obstacles; recalling his words, tear shed to my eyelids unknowingly.

There was a person who thought that the Venerable Master was very mystical so he wanted to ‘investigate’ carefully. After hearing the Venerable Master said for half a day, he only heard phrases such as: *“Recite the Buddha’s name, Do not eat meat”*, this person thought that: *“I myself can also say that, there is no need to ask the Venerable!”* That is correct. Everyone can say that, but none of us passes through the ascetic cultivation and has true Kung Fu 43[43] like him. We have no merits and virtues to convert others. Therefore, even if we have the passion to help others, people still ridicule that we are ‘nagging’.

The Venerable Master subdued himself. He had high cultivation skill naturally, he could convert ten thousands of people. When he was young, he cultivated in a mountain cave. When the food he brought with him was all gone, he relied only on wild potatoes and roots to maintain his life. He had three robes that were patched repeatedly so many times until only one left. He sat without ever lying down for 60 years. He had very little need for materials. When he was young, his master at Cheng Tian Temple was Reverend Master Zhuan Chen who taught him that:

*“Eat the food that nobody eats; wear the things that nobody wants; do the things that others don’t, you will know later on.”*

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<sup>42</sup>[42] **Venerable Master Hsu Yun.** He is a contemporary Buddhist monk of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, renowned for his cultivation skills and merits. “Hsu Yun” means “Empty Cloud.” He is a patriarch for seven Buddhist lineages. He passes away at age 120 (from Wikipedia).

<sup>43</sup>[43] **Kung Fu.** In Chinese, these words mean cultivation or practice. In Buddhist context, they refer to the cultivation skills.

His master taught him to cultivate ascetically and focused on reciting the Buddha's name. He followed the teachings faithfully and cultivated wholeheartedly. Eventually, he became an extraordinary person. Many people would just meet him and were moved. They admired and respected him greatly.

His Dharma talk usually consisted of just a few sentences, but they had very important meanings. If we can believe and follow, we definitely will not waste our lives. We have said previously, '*recite the Buddha's name*' and '*do not eat meat.*' If we recite the Buddha's name in every single thought, the great lights of wisdom, kindness, compassion, and the enlightenment of the Buddhas are occupied in our mind. *Thus, is it auspicious all the time?* There will be no pains and sufferings of 'You and I, Rights and Wrongs'. There will be no more tortures by greed, anger and ignorance. If we can lessen our desires for food and drink, and follow his teaching of "do not eat meat", gradually we will understand the principles "have the same roots" (same essence). We will enjoy the happiness of kindness and compassion. Everyday, our mind will be natural, peaceful, and simple. We will have deep faith, sincere vows and reciting the Buddha's name to reborn in the Western Pure Land. At the time of death, we will rely on the Buddha's power to receive us and to transcend the painful sufferings of life after life and kalpa after kalpa of the life-and-death cycle! 44[44] His two simple sentences point out the brightening road to reach Buddhahood in one life. Whoever faithfully listen, believe and follow will benefit greatly. People who are not honest, but like to talk about superior theories, to do strange things, to show off some supernatural powers, and look down upon this most important teaching will lose the valuable opportunity to escape the life-and-death cycle.

Disciples of the Venerable Master retold the story that when the Venerable Master was still alive, one day, a man holding a briefcase with 007-espionage type of style, secretly went to the mountain and wanted to talk 'privately' with him. In the past, some people wanted to hurt the Venerable, therefore the disciples did not allow this man to meet the Venerable privately. This man came and whispered respectfully into the Venerable's ear:

*"Most Venerable! People said that you have supernatural powers. Please tell me truthfully if you have supernatural powers 45[45] or not?"*

After which the old monk also secretly whispered into the man's ear, *"I tell you. If I eat, I will have power. If I don't eat, I have no power!"*

The wonders of the Buddha Dharma are in the very ordinary, not attracting the curiosity of people with spiritual powers or strange appearance. Everyone has complete spiritual powers, but because greed, anger, ignorance, pride, doubt, and affliction cover them, therefore our spiritual powers do not manifest. Having spiritual powers, but cannot solve the life-and-death problem is still having nothing. Looking out and rely on "people with spiritual powers"

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<sup>44[44]</sup> ***Life-and-Death Cycle.*** Buddhists believe that living beings have life after life. When they die, their bodies decay but their consciousnesses are not. The consciousnesses simply move on to another form, another body. Thus, this refers to as the Life-and-Death Cycle.

<sup>45[45]</sup> ***Supernatural powers or Spiritual powers*** refer to the extraordinary powers that true Buddhist cultivators develop. **Abhijna** (Sanskrit, Pali **abhiñña**) in Buddhism is higher or spiritual knowledge obtained through virtuous living and meditation. These higher knowledges include worldly extra-sensory abilities (such as seeing past and future lives) as well as the supramundane extinction of all mental defilements. In the Pali Cannon, the higher knowledges are typically enumerated in a group of six or of three types of knowledge (Wikipedia)

for help is to let go of ‘the roots’ (the basics) and to find the ‘branch’. The Venerable Master said, *“Asking people for help is to lose Shakyamuni Buddha.”*

I feel that his greatest ‘spiritual power’ deserved for everyone to praise is his patience. *“Endure what others cannot endure. Do things that others cannot do.”* In the early years when he just returned from the mountain cave to Cheng Tian Temple in China, his hairs had grown so long that he looked like a wild man. Nobody recognized him until he explained clearly. After returning to the temple for a while, the Head Master and the Hall Master of the temple would like to test his cultivation skills. They purposely took the money in the donation box and hid it away. Then they pretended that they were suspicious that the Venerable Master had stolen the money. Since then, everyone thought that the Venerable Master had stolen; everyone mocked and ridiculed him. He listened to theirs words naturally and peacefully, as if the spring wind was just passing by and as drinking sweet dews. His mind was extremely immense. Indeed, he was completely free and had the self-mastery. His ‘spiritual power’ of patience comparing with those of ‘emitting light or smoke’ was much more wonderful, because burning paper would produce smoke, lighting the lamp would emit light. However, let us ask ourselves that, *which one of us being accused of stealing, but still feel naturally and at ease, as if drinking sweet dews and does not need to explain that we are not the one who steals?* Whoever has the cultivation skills up to the level that can see through worldly matters as if they are floating water plants or as bubbles are the ones with great wisdom, worthy of respect from others. Normally, we turn into things that the old monk described as *“the dog is chasing after the stone”*. It is very easy when people want us to run [like a dog]. They only need to throw a stone, and we will immediately run after it until weaken and exhausted, to chase after an inedible stone! The Venerable Master opened his eyes widely and said, *“If there is no goal (no solid will), how can you get reborn in the Western Pure Land?”*

He had complete control of himself and at ease in life and death. Everyone respected him. He searched for no fame or profits; it reflected through his daily activities. He made everyone to respect him wholeheartedly. One time, a newspaper writer threatened him and wanted to extort money. The writer said: *“My pen is extremely powerful. If you don’t give me money, I will write bad things about you.”* The Venerable Master replied at ease, *“Go ahead and put on the newspaper whatever you want to write. I do not need people to respect me. If people respect me, I will have to recite the Great Compassion Mantra into water 46[46] for them. If they don’t respect me, I will have more spare time and purely recite Amitabha Buddha.”* This writer could do nothing and lament that the Venerable Master was not like ordinary living beings. Indeed, *“Once reaching the stage of no mind, there will be happiness. When people do not crave for things, their merits and virtues will be elevated.”*

One time, there were a number of disciples following him to listen to a lecture. They realized that the lecturing Dharma Master purposely criticized the Venerable Master in the lecture. They got upset and told him their thought after returning to the temple. Unexpectedly, not only that the Venerable Master was not upset, he even told this group of disciples to repent with that Dharma Master. He also explained (on behalf of that Dharma Master) the hidden

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<sup>46[46]</sup> *The purpose of recite the Great Compassion Mantra* into water is to use one’s own pure and devout mind to unite one’s mind with the mind of the Great Compassionate Kwan Yin Bodhisattva. By the virtues of his exalted mind, the water also has the virtues of purity and compassion, thus it becomes an excellent medicine to cure diseases. This action is based on one basic teaching of Buddhism, the root of all diseases are the defilements of the mind.

meanings of those words. He told the disciples that if people call out your Dharma name and scold you, you would still have to thank them. Much less was in this case when they did not mention the name specifically. He sternly explained the principles: *“If you want the Buddha Dharma to proliferate, then Sangha must praise Sangha.”* He praised that Dharma Master: *“In this evil world whoever can save living beings is indeed a Bodhisattva.”* And humbly added: *“I myself dare not to.”* The cultivation skills of the Venerable Master had attained to an unthinkable level. Daily activities expressed the vast and immense heart of the Venerable Master. Every single story moved me. He was like the sunlight kindly and compassionately illuminating every single blade of grass, every single tree. However, sometimes he did use his sword of wisdom to cut clean all the branches and leaves of afflictions, to cut clean all the fame and profits, and to gear young people toward the Western Pure Land. He often gave sudden tests, usually very exciting and stimulating ones. His ability to “perform the play” was outstanding. People who were tested often moved by the conditions. If they did not recognize right away, they would not know. However, with time they would realize and understand his hidden kind and compassionate intentions. His method and practice could be visualized as *“Husking until the entire hulls are gone, until the rice turns white. Grind until fine and heat until the color changes.”* This method helped a serious and sincere cultivator to become *“a sagely cake that could offer to all living beings, to all Buddhas.”* The duration it took to attain this level often required lots of sweat and tears. Sometimes the Venerable Master tearfully and compassionately told the disciple subjected to the testing that: *“I am teaching you, do you understand clearly? I am afraid to create bad offenses with you. I purposely want to help you to break through the attachments, but if you do not understand my intentions, then I will create vengeful karmic obstacles with you. I purposely create these adverse states, so I can train you specifically.”*

The Patriarchs said that three necessities for rebirth to the Western Pure Land are “Faith, Vow, and Practice.” *Vow means to dislike and would like to leave the Saha World* 47[47] *and to prefer the Land of Ultimate Bliss.* (The Saha World is created by the ‘self evil mind’ and the ‘filthy mind’; the Land of Ultimate Bliss is created by the ‘self pure mind’). Master Li also emphasized the mind that ‘really likes’ and ‘dislikes’48[48] is the necessity for achieving success in the practice of reciting the Buddha’s name. In the favorable environments and circumstances, ordinary living beings like us are very hard to bring forth the mind to dislike the Saha World. Reluctantly, the Venerable, the Buddhas and the Bodhisattvas purposely ‘give’ us the adverse environments and circumstances, so that we can ‘use sufferings as teacher’. We will courageously bring forth the mind that dislikes the Saha World and prefers the Land of Ultimate Bliss. Thus, we can recite the Buddha’s name and transcend life and death. Use the vigor and afflictions in this life to exchange for the self-mastery and eternal happiness. This is the most valuable favor that they ‘give’ us. The problem is that we prefer the ‘delayed-action mines that have beautiful coverings outside’. We keep chasing after the pleasures, fame, and profit at a time, but losing the eternal peace. The Buddhas and Bodhisattvas often shed tears because of our great loss.

One time the Venerable Master sternly said:

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<sup>47</sup>[47] *Saha World* refers to our present world. Saha is a “Sanskrit” (ancient East Indian language) word meaning that living beings in this world are able to endure the sufferings. In Buddhist context, it usually refers to the world of sufferings.

<sup>48</sup>[48] This is the mind that really ‘likes’ the Land of Ultimate Bliss and ‘dislikes’ the Saha world.

*“In this Saha World, if we still have the desires, even only for a blade of grass, that desire will cause us to fall back into the reincarnation cycle.”*

Therefore, regardless of how much people respect and make offerings to him, he lets go of everything transcendently. For him, the temple with the grand and majestic architecture on the mountain is only a ‘device to teach at one time’. He borrowed the circumstances and the environments to teach living beings with affinity. People who let go of everything and sincerely recite the Buddha’s name for rebirth are his true disciples. Not long before rebirth, he repeated over and over:

*“The sufferings will increase everyday. Let us cultivate quickly. Must cultivate quickly. Cultivate one part; get one part of merits. Cultivate a thousand parts; receive a thousand merits. Cultivate ten thousand parts; receive ten thousand merits!”*

He patiently repeated it over and over; this is a very serious advice. *If you believe in his words then just sincerely recite the Buddha’s name. Faithfully follow one method and do not change back and forth!*

One dharma friend retold the story when he visited and asked the Venerable Master :

*“How do we recite the Buddha’s name?”*

After hearing the question, he asked in return, *“How do you recite?”*

This friend replied, *“When I have spare time, I immediately recite the Buddha’s name”.*

The Venerable Master said: *“When you have ‘spare time’, you will recite. If not, then you do not recite. Thus, are you sure that you know the Buddha “very well?” Reciting like that, how can you expect the Buddha to save you at the instant of life-and-death? Come here, everyone show your leg. Which one is the Buddha’s leg? Recognize which leg belongs to the Buddha? If you want to hold onto to the Buddha’s leg, but you do not recognize which one belongs to the Buddha, how can you hold onto it? Are you sure you really recognize the Buddha?”* (The phrase “Hold on to the Buddha’s leg” means that you are requesting the Buddha for help.)

He said so in order to wake people up. This dharma friend continued with the story. The Venerable Master took one sip of tea and asked, *“Do you see me recite in audible sound?”* The friend replied, *“No”*. He asked again, *“When I recite the Buddha’s name, do you know?”* The Venerable Master taught things lively and recited the Buddha’s name while drinking tea, eating, standing, walking, laying, sitting, in another word, all the time. At midnight without turning on the light, you hear ‘a sneezing sound’ then you know your dad comes home. So at midnight, *if Amitabha Buddha comes, then do you know the Buddha’s arrival? We need to ask ourselves if we recite the Buddha’s name up to the level that we can recognize the Buddha and know him very well or not.* The Venerable Master had reached that level. One time he told a visiting doctor, *“All the bird’s singing, the car running, the mixing sounds are the sounds of reciting the Buddha’s name.”* The doctor asked him how long he could recite like that. He replied, ‘six periods per day’ (meaning twenty four hours everyday, he can recite so).

Ten years ago, the Venerable Master told his disciples, *“In the future when I get reborn, I will manifest illness”*. In addition, he mentioned that there are three people in his group of disciples who will not send him off when he passes away (present during his passing). These

three disciples did not believe him because [they think] one of them will always be at his side. How can he say that they will not ‘send him off?’ However, just as he said, when he was passing away and for some special reasons, all three were temporarily away when he got reborn.

Before passing, he encouraged the great assembly:

*“The Saha World is very afflicted! Everybody must sincerely recite the Buddha’s name to go to the Western Land of Ultimate Bliss.”*

Finally he said, *“Neither come nor go, there is nothing!”* Then he peacefully and naturally, recited the Buddha’s name and passed away. It was so beautiful and transcendental!

On the contrary, we are *“Come; come; go; go; there are too many things! (bad things)”* There is no single day, no single minute that we do not have things to worry and concern. The word ‘bad thing’ in the Taiwanese dialect means inauspicious, just like people often said:

*‘If you are not a carefree type of person, then you are not free. People who are unoccupied are not ordinary people.’*

If there is really ‘nothing’ in our mind, [being able to have] nothing occupied in our minds requires cultivation skills. It is really not easy!

About one week before his rebirth, he recited the Buddha’s name aloud day and night. His method was to ‘use all his strength and faithfully recited Amitabha Buddha’. Not everyone could do that. The Great Assembly 49[49] took turn to recite aloud with him, but they got husky voices and chest pain. They could not handle that whereas he was already 95 years old! The majority of people when they are about passing away, their breaths weaken. They cannot control themselves. However, he was like the *‘general to break through the enemies lines to escape the evil world of five turbidities.’* Some disciples worried that he was weak and could not take it because he had not eaten anything for the entire month. They told him:

*“Let us recite, Master, please do not recite. You only need to listen!”*

He opened his eyes and replied determinately, *“Each one recites for himself or herself. The Life and Death matter of any individual has to be severed by himself or herself.”*

After saying so, he immediately and sincerely continued to recite aloud. On the Friday of that week, he suddenly ‘performed’ a play. I thought it is worthwhile for us to reflect. That day, he suddenly did not encourage everyone to recite Amitabha Buddha as before, but he commanded the Great Assembly to bring the Great Tripitaka 50[50] out to recite. The Great Tripitaka was so huge, so no one knew where to begin. They asked the Venerable Master which volume they should recite?

He replied, *“Recite everything.”*

The Great Assembly then brought out each volume of the Great Tripitaka. Just to bring the Great Tripitaka out was enough for them to be out of breath. Seeing the Venerable Master

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<sup>49[49]</sup> **Great Assembly.** In Buddhist context, this refers to an aggregation of Buddhist monks, nuns, lay disciples, and/or other living beings.

<sup>50[50]</sup> **Great Tripitaka.** This refers to the general collections of the Buddha’s teaching. Tripitaka means “three treasures” or literally, “three baskets.” It consists of the Sutra (The Buddha’s words), the Vinaya (precepts), and the Shastra (commentaries on the sutra by the Buddha’s disciples). See note 2 for more.

seriously wanted to reborn, everyone was tired, urgent, and sad. He said, “Let’s see which sutra do all of you know, recite everything for me!” Therefore, the Great Assembly started to recite one set after another set: *The Heart Sutra, The Vajra Sutra, The Medicine Master Sutra, The Earth Store Sutra...* At the critical moment of life and death, people realized that they could not recite smoothly the two hundred some words in the Heart Sutra. We could say that their mouth recited, but their mind was full of worries. While everyone was reciting that way, the Venerable Master smiled and continued to recite: “*Namo*<sup>51[51]</sup> *Amitabha Buddha, Namō Amitabha Buddha*”. He was not a little bit affected by the reciting sounds of the Great Assembly. His smile was indeed a gigantic stick hitting the head of everyone! In this surprise play, who did ‘recite everything’? Only the Venerable Master *recited clearly one phrase after another. Recitation after recitation, faithfully, seriously and powerfully he recited the name of Amitabha Buddha. This is indeed to ‘recite everything’ of the Great Tripitaka!*

Let’s do not doubtful why the Most Venerable changed the subject suddenly like that. He often used the ‘opposite’ method skillfully to waken everyone and to make everyone to engrave memory into their bone, into their marrow. The final meaning of cultivation is to ‘practice’, not just to listen and to pass it by. In medical school, discussion of treating illness in the books is obviously very different from that of seeing patients bleeding severely! Perhaps, you will think the manifestation of the Venerable Master is very similar to the saying of Master Li:

*‘Six holy words include the essences of all the ten thousands Dharmas’.*

The majority of people are very afflicted at the time of death. Even with only four words “Amitabha Buddha”, people still cannot recite. Much less is to recite the Sutra, especially the Great Tripitaka! We need to listen to the teaching and *‘faithfully reciting the Buddha’s name, do not change the topic’* anymore. Do not get into the circumstances of *‘practicing all eighteen kinds of martial arts, but when we are in painful sufferings, we do not know which one to use.’* 52[52] Every day we change the topic, it appears as if we learn a lot and create many affinities with the Buddhas and the Bodhisattvas. However, in time of needs, our ‘mind is as confused as the silk cocoon, not knowing which one to recite. In reality, the Amitabha Sutra said: *‘The Buddhas of the Six Directions manifested their wide and long tongues to praise Amitabha Buddha, advised living beings to have faith and vow to reborn to the Western Pure Land.’* This explains clearly that *when we recite Amitabha Buddha, then all Buddhas rejoice and praise. This is indeed to ‘recite everything’.*

Two days before the Venerable Master reborn in Sukhavati (Pure Land), he beat the wooden fish 53[53] himself and told disciples to recite the Buddha’s name. There were many

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<sup>51[51]</sup> **Namo:** a Sanskrit term used to honor the Buddha or Bodhisattvas, literally means ‘homage’.

<sup>52[52]</sup> **Practicing all eighteen kinds of martial arts but when we are in painful sufferings, we do not know which one to use.**

This is a Chinese analogy meaning that we can study many methods but when we are really in needs, we do not know which one to use.

<sup>53[53]</sup> **Wooden Fish.** A wooden fish (Chinese: mùyú), (Japanese: mokugyo), (Korean: muktak), sometimes known as a Chinese block, is a wooden percussion instrument similar to the Western wood block. The wooden fish is used by monks and laity in the Mahayana Buddhist tradition. It is often used during rituals usually involving the recitation of sutras, mantras, or other Buddhist texts. The wooden fish is mainly used by Buddhist disciples in China, Japan, Korea, and other East Asian countries where the practice of Mahayana, such as the ceremonious reciting of sutras, is prevalent. In some Zen/Ch’an Buddhist traditions, the wooden fish serves as a signal to start and end a meditation session, and in Pure Land Buddhism, it is used to chant the name of Amitabha. There are two kinds of wooden fish. One is the well known wooden fish that is round in shape with scales carved on its top. In Buddhism the fish, which never sleeps, symbolizes wakefulness. Therefore, it is to remind the chanting monks to be

interesting stories. He connected the phrase ‘*Namo Western World of Ultimate Bliss*’ to the holy names of the Buddhas and the Bodhisattvas. For instance, ‘*Namo Western World of Ultimate Bliss Manjusri Bodhisattva, Nam Western World of Ultimate Bliss Universal Worthy Bodhisattva, Nam Western World of Ultimate Bliss Maitreya Bodhisattva* 54[54]...I understand his intention is that ‘we can meet all these Bodhisattvas at the “World of Ultimate Bliss.” We only need to focus on reciting Amitabha Buddha seeking rebirth, then we can walk together with the Bodhisattvas when we arrive at the Western Pure Land!

One time I accompanied a physician to ascend the mountain to visit the Venerable Master. This doctor asked, “*How do we sit in meditation in order to penetrate the body pathway or meridian* 55[55].” He replied, “*No need to penetrate the body pathway or meridian; just single-mindedly recite the Buddha’s name until attaining the Buddha Recitation Samadhi* 56[56] *then all the pathway or meridian will flow freely themselves!*” This is the teaching of an enlightened person who had attained great self-mastery. If we understand then we will not waste our time and energy to look for something useless. Quickly prepare your personal belongings as he said:

*“I already bought my ticket! Already got confirmation for my seat!*

*Have you bought your ticket yet?*

*Do you have confirmation of the seat yet?*

*Or you do not need confirmation?*

*Or you do not want to get on the car?”*

Buying a ticket early is better. Don’t be like me. After his rebirth, I ascended the mountain to recite the Buddha’s name. Reciting for a few hours, my tears kept flowing, and I could not recite formally to make offerings to the Venerable Master. I dared not to look up because I did not follow his teaching and advice properly. Shame and Repentance are both painful. I pray that all of you will soon get the first-class ticket of the first cabin and ascend the golden lotus pedestal at the Superior Stage Superior Rebirth Level! 57[57]

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concentrate on their [sutra](#). The round wooden fish comes in many sizes, ranging from 6 inches to 4 feet. The other is literally in the shape of a fish. It is found suspended in front of the dining hall of a Buddhist monastery. When having breakfast and lunch, the monks beat it to call all monastics and laity to eat (From Wikipedia).

<sup>54[54]</sup> ***Manjusri, Universal Worthy, Maitreya Bodhisattvas.*** These are the names of the Great Bodhisattvas in Buddhism.

Manjusri is the Bodhisattva foremost in Wisdom. Universal Worthy Bodhisattva (Samantabhadra) is foremost in Practice.

Maitreya Bodhisattva is the future Buddha, and is the next Buddha in our present world. See note 32 for more.

<sup>55[55]</sup> ***Meridian:*** According to the techniques and doctrines of Traditional Chinese Medicine, the body's vital energy, "qi", circulates through the body along specific interconnected channels called pathways or meridians. Qi is difficult to translate and is usually left untranslated. Literally the word “Qi” means "air". In this context, "Qi" means "flow of energy" inside the body.

<sup>56[56]</sup> ***Buddha Recitation Samadhi*** refers to the mental power level that one can attain when cultivating the Buddha Recitation Method (also known as the Dharma-Door of Mindfulness of the Buddha or the Pure Land Method). Samadhi is a “Sanskrit (ancient East Indian language)” word meaning “proper concentration.” In this Buddha Recitation Samadhi state, one will be constantly mindful of the Buddha. Whatever sound he/she hears will be the recitation sound of the Amitabha Buddha’s name.

<sup>57[57]</sup> ***Superior Stage Superior Rebirth Level*** refers to the highest level one can attain rebirth at the Pure Land (Land of the Ultimate Bliss). There are nine stages ranking from lowest to highest. The level or stage depends on one’s cultivation skill of reciting Amitabha Buddha’s holy name. The more diligent and sincere one cultivates, the higher the stage. Buddhists believe that when one makes a vow to reborn to the Pure Land, one lotus will grow in that world. The more one diligent and sincerely recites Amitabha Buddha’s name, the bigger that lotus. When that person passes away, Amitabha Buddha and the Sagely Assembly will bring that person’s consciousness to the Pure Land and place it in the lotus flower. From there that person will take on a new life full of bliss and blessings. The stages refer to how big the lotus flowers are. See notes 1 and 11 for more.

Then, we will look at Master Li. He was a contemporary person with great merits and reborn [to the land of Ultimate Bliss] at 97 years old. *Hence, why do we have to remind of his age at rebirth* 58[58]? In previous sections, we mentioned that there were people who fell ill and died when they were thirty plus years old. Their family members even lamented that the suffering lives of these people were too long. However, when the Venerable Master was reborn at 95 years old and Master Li at 97 years old, everyone lamented that it was too short. Every one cried and requested them to stay in this world forever to save living beings.

I attended the sutra lecture being grateful to Master Li. Ten years ago, I had the opportunity to listen to his lecture on the *Flower Adornment Sutra* 59[59] at the Ci Guang Library in Taizhong. He had the Shan Dong accent (very hard to hear) and there was translation into Taiwanese (Fukienese). However, my Taiwanese was very limited. I still did not understand and feel that the time was too long and uninteresting. Seeing people around listening to the Sutra and often laughed aloud, but I knew nothing. Occasionally, I heard one sentence that I felt somewhat familiar as if I had heard it somewhere previously, but I still did not understand. A few days ago, I dreamed at midnight to see the bright moon on the mountain. Suddenly, I recalled the lectures of the Master ten years go. At that time, he lectured on the *Flower Adornment Sutra* to the section 'Endless Treasure.' He mentioned a few lines in the Ce Bi (Red Cliff) 60[60] Poem of Su Dong Po 61[61]:

One unknown person had translated as following:

*“The cool wind blows on the river delta,  
The bright moon shines on the deep mountain,  
The sounds pass by the ears,  
The eyes capture the scenes,  
Oh, the endless treasure of the creator!”*

He explained the words 'endless treasure' in this poem derived from the Buddhist Sutra. At midnight, I dreamed and recalled this story, and then the phone rang and woke me up. I saw neither forest, nor mountain, nor bright moon, but only the patients who were in discomfort. The nurses called me up to see them. After the dream, I regretted even more. At the time, I listened to the sutra and did not understand. I thought that he did not lecture well. The truth was that my level was too low (indeed, there was no level at all!). Therefore, I denigrated him that he did not lecture well, and I did not continue to listen for ten years. I almost lost my own dharma body and wisdom life. After a while, he did not lecture anymore. When I participated in the Vegetarian Precept Study Society, I was influenced greatly by Dharma Master Chan Yun. I could say that the Vegetarian Precept Study Society had changed my life. In the evening recitation, the dharma master read the transference of merits to the elderly master Guang Qin and the lay elderly master Li Bing Nan. It gave me a deep impression.

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<sup>58[58]</sup> **Rebirth.** This refers to the rebirth to the Western Pure Land (Land of Ultimate Bliss). Buddhists recite the name of Amitabha Buddha (the Pure Land Dharma Door or Method) so that they can reborn to his world.

<sup>59[59]</sup> **Flower Adornment Sutra or Avatamsaka Sutra.** This Buddhist Sutra describes the 10 stages that a Bodhisattva must go through and attain in order to achieve Buddhahood. It is a very long sutra and consists of several volumes.

<sup>60[60]</sup> **Ce Bi.** This is the name of a famous battle during the Three Kingdom Period in China. Ce Bi means red cliff.

<sup>61[61]</sup> **Su Dong Po** is a famous poet lived during the Song Dynasty in China.

One day on a special condition, I followed some lotus friends to go to the Sutra lecture. That day, Master Li's feet swelled up so big that he could not walk, and people had to use a sedan chair to carry him on stage. Buddha Dharma is indeed so important and the person who propagated the Dharma was so great. His feet swelled up such that he was unable to walk, but he continued to lecture on the Sutra and to give a Dharma talk. In that lecture, I cried from the beginning to the end. My records of the lecture were poor, and the words were not clear. Up to now, I still did not remember what the content of the lecture was about. However, the boundless kindness and compassionate heart of Master Li vibrated my mind severely. I was deeply moved because of the vow *'to sacrifice oneself for the sake of the Dharma'* of Master Li. If there was no passion of the Master to propagate the Dharma, there was no way to save my stupid and stubborn mind. From that point on, I moved to Taizhong, so I could listen to his lecture conveniently.

Each month, I always requested the hospital to schedule my shift that would give me the time off for the Sutra lecture. I would rather work consecutively for a few days and get tired rather than to miss his lecture. *"It is very hard to have the human body. This is a very rare cause and condition; Buddha Dharma is very difficult to encounter. It is a very rare opportunity to encounter the Buddha Dharma in many kalpas. If we pass it by, no one can make up for this loss!"*

Everyday, my patients cried and lamented to remind me the importance of this topic. It was not that no one advised me: "You should eat more nutritious food, perm your hair more beautifully, dress in nicer clothes," but I understood deeply the urgent matter of life and death in our lives. These things were not even a bit important! *We must see clearly, understand thoroughly, listen to the Sutra, and practice to change our lives; all of those things are much more beneficial.* Thus, although the Shan Dong accent of Master Li was very hard to understand, but whichever sentence I could understand, I would cherish it. This was a very rare opportunity and hard to encounter in thousands of lives. Much less was the translation into Taiwanese dialect of Uncle Jian was very clear and fluent. This helped a lot. Any remaining part I did not understand, then I went to Taizhong to listen respectfully to the elders in Lotus Society for re-explanation. When listening to the re-explanation, I realized that the Dharma friends were very studious. They understood the principles in depth and vigorously practiced them. Everyone was attracted and moved by the teachings as well as by the merits and virtues of the Master. Every Wednesday, many people from everywhere such as Taipei, Tainan, Kao Hsiung flocked to Taizhong to listen to the lecture. I met many people donning long robes and reciting beads in their hands. Indeed, it was a very gentle, beautiful, and cooling scene in the Saha World. I still remembered clearly the final lecture of the Master. He used the great compassionate vow, sentence-by-sentence, encouraged everyone must always *'purely and continuously do the recitations'*. These were the words in the Chapter of Great Strength Bodhisattva Buddha Recitation Perfect Penetration 62[62]. Many people were deeply touched, and they could not hold back their tears.

The Master used all his might in the last few breaths to advise every one:

*'Purely and continuously do the recitation' is a very important thing in cultivation.'*

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<sup>62[62]</sup> *Buddha Recitation Perfect Penetration* refers to the cultivation level or skill attained by Buddhists who practice to recite the Buddha's name.

*Can we really do that yet? Buddhist Sutra usually begins with the line: “Thus, I have heard.” On the surface we have the ‘ear’ to listen, but the final line “Rejoicingly believe and receive, bow and go out”, how many of us can do so? According to Patriarch Ou Yi 63[63], when the body and mind are happy, it is called ‘rejoicing’. When there is no doubt, it is called ‘belief’. Acknowledge and do not forget is called ‘receive’. Grateful to the great merits and take refuge and bow down is called ‘perform ceremony’. Follow the teachings to cultivate without retreat is called ‘go out’. Do we really ‘follow in line with the teaching and cultivate, solidly seeking rebirth and no retreat’? Thinking about this question is very embarrassing; if everyone tries to think, everyone will see [what I mean]. I myself know that my false thoughts are as powerful as the oozing lava from the volcano. However, my pure recitation is as weak as holding a small bucket of water to put off the fire. If we want to change the power of these two forces (false thoughts and pure recitation), we must practice very hard. If not, then when our bodies are healthy and our minds are clear, we still cannot control ourselves; we do not know what our next thought will be. By the time of passing, it will be even worse!*

The Master taught us, *“When reciting the Buddha’s name, do not seek to recite a lot. Recite 108 times [during which] our mind is not scattered. If there is one scattering thought, turn the recitation bead and recite again from the beginning.”* I practiced this way for a while, but my mind was only free of defilements during the moment I touched the first three beads, unknowingly if there were any scattering thoughts in these three recitations. Recite 10,000, 20,000 up to 60,000 or 70,000 names, it will be very hard to find ‘108 pure and continuous recitations.’ This mind is indeed scattered to a very dangerous level. Dangerous but we ourselves do not know. *Therefore, how can we not working harder?* Let us look at the Master again and engraved this teaching in our heart. The solid eyes of the Master, the eyes looked toward the Western Pure Land. They looked toward the endless space and also at the poor living beings with endless sufferings and afflictions. The Master taught us:

*“To the end of all space throughout the Dharma realm is the body of Amitabha Buddha. We lay in the heart of Amitabha Buddha, so that the Buddha comes to receive us very easily. This is just like the table before us. There is an ant that crawls from one side to the other. If it crawls in a straight line, it will crawl for a long time. Just like Amitabha Buddha, we can bring the ant from one side to the other and vice-versa. We come and go many times, but the ant is still not reaching the other side. We recite the Buddha’s name until we receive the response. The Buddha comes and receives us in the same way. How do we get response with Amitabha Buddha? We must put down all five desires and six objects of the senses 64[64]. The reason that people reciting the Buddha’s name, but have no response is because these things are binding to them.”*

Let us vow that we can faithfully follow his teaching in our lives. We can be like the Master. We can predict the day and the time of rebirth, save many living beings and perfect the Bodhi vow.

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<sup>63[63]</sup> **Ou Yi Patriarch.** He is the ninth Buddhist Patriarch of the Pure Land School. He lived during the Ching Dynasty in China.

<sup>64[64]</sup> **Five desires:** Desires connected with the five senses.

**Six objects of the senses:** All the mundane things that can cloud our bright Self-Nature. These include sight, sound, smell, taste, touch and mental formations. These objects correspond to the five senses (eye, ear, nose, tongue and body) and the discriminating, everyday mind.

Probably someone will say that it is very difficult to have the opportunity to meet people like Most Venerable Guang Qin or the lay elderly master Li Bing Nan. *What can we do as ordinary living beings?* Everyone, please look at the sarira 65[65] of the laywoman Lai Xia Miao at Yuan Lin. They have five colors that are transparent and illuminating like lapis lazuli, carnelian, and beautiful jade... Aunt Miao worked diligently since the time she believed in the Buddha until now. Everyday, she woke up and put on the praying robe. She opened the doors to welcome the Buddhas and the Bodhisattvas. Every day she recited the Buddha's name faithfully; she was a very kind and compassionate person and talked very little. She also recited up to the level that she knew ahead of time the day of rebirth. She requested lotus friends to help her with the recitation. The lotus friends replied that, helping recitation in the summer is very uncomfortable. She said:

*“No problem, I will select a cool day for rebirth!”*

Let's think about it! She could even pick a cool day for rebirth. It is so relaxing and self-mastery. To the end, everyone helped her to recite. She did not recite out loud, but her hand hit on the bed to harmonize with the Buddha recitation sounds of everyone. She was clearly mindful of the Buddha to be reborn to the West. After cremation, there were lots of beautiful five-colored relics. This helped to strengthen the faith for future followers. She lived very simple daily. She did not need to buy jewels, but to use her deep faith and every recitation of Amitabha Buddha to accumulate the adorned jewels from her self-nature. Each time we recite the name Amitabha Buddha, we immediately gather the measureless merits and virtues of the Buddha into our own merits and virtues. Relying on faith-vow-practice to do the recitation. Recite one line, [will achieve] one inconceivable line. Recite 100 lines, 1000 lines, 10,000 lines, each line is as just as inconceivable! The ancients had the verse: *“Who is Shun, who is Yu 66[66]. If they can do it, so can you!”* (King Yao Shun and King Great Yu are kings that are well known for their kindness and filiality. I am also a person. If I try with all my heart, I can do like King Shun and King Yu.) If an old lady can do that, *why don't we look at and follow her suit? Do we have more (or less) intelligence than this old lady?* The principles of the Pure Land Method are very deep and wonderful. If we really want to understand it in depth, only Patriarchs such as Ma Ming, Long Shou, Zhi Zhe and Yong Ming 67[67] could handle it. If we use false thoughts to fathom then the more we think, the farther away we get. On the contrary, the old lady just sincerely recited the Buddha's name, gradually entered the Buddha's wisdom, and silently matched with the profound and wonderful principles.

Perhaps someone would ask, *“Does reciting the Buddha's name have such great power?”* Yes, it does. Let us not talk about the measureless merits and virtues of the Buddha's holy name yet. First, let us use a common name as an example such as 'tangerine' (or orange). A farmer wants to plant tangerine, so that he can sell in the autumn. Someone will enjoy the sweet and refreshing tastes of tangerine. From the time of seeding, planting, and fertilizing, it takes lots of efforts. The tangerine tree goes through many spring rains, scorching summer

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<sup>65[65]</sup> **Sariras** (relics) are crystal like remains of highly evolved individuals after a cremation. These rare relics are physical proof that the individual has achieved certain level of spiritual understanding. Eighty thousand pieces of relics were left after the cremation of Shakyamuni Buddha.

<sup>66[66]</sup> **King Shun and King Yu.** These are the Sagely Kings of ancient China well known for their merits and virtues.

<sup>67[67]</sup> **Ma Ming, Long Shou, Zhi Zhe, Yong Ming.** These are the names of important Buddhist Patriarchs well known for their contributions to Buddhism.

heat, and storms. From the black earth, it turns into a tree laden with golden and shining fruits emitting full fragrance. This takes a long time and lots of hard work. It is not easy. The tangerine has an extremely close connection with the entire world. The roots deeply enter the ground. The tree breathes in the vast air and blends in the atmosphere that we breathe daily. Both of us receive the light source from the unbiased sun. The farmer must depend on the labor and the flower fruits (achievement) of others to maintain his own life. He needs to dress, and when he gets sick, he needs to see a doctor. The tangerine has a very complex history. However, when a mother asks her son, “*What do you want to eat?*” You only need to say, “*Tangerine*” and immediately [your mother will give you a tangerine], you can eat an extremely sweet tangerine. You enjoy the fruits that the farmer must work very hard to obtain.

*Is it not so?* An ordinary tangerine is already like that. Much more is the ten thousands merits and virtues holy name of ‘Amitabha Buddha’. The efforts to reach Buddhahood require countless difficulties and endurances. It requires vast and compassionate vows that shake the heaven and the earth. In addition, it requires practicing the patience and the vigor over many kalpas in order to achieve the inconceivable Buddha fruit. Reciting the Buddha’s name is just like tasting the tangerine, enjoying the sweet taste of the fruit. In this holy name ‘Amitabha Buddha’, the Buddha gives us measureless and boundless happiness. He gives us the fruit harvested from all of his cultivation labor. Some people swallow it immediately, and others enjoy the flavors gradually. Everyone tastes a different flavor, but all quench his or her thirst.

The holy name ‘Amitabha Buddha’ contains all the adornments, niceties, self-mastery, and relaxing of the World of Ultimate Bliss. Everything is there already, but only people with sincere faith and vow can receive them. Supposedly, you decide not to believe that in saying ‘tangerine’, your mother will give you a ‘tangerine’ to eat. Rather, you decide that you want to plant the seed yourself and growing into a tangerine tree. This is fine too, but we worry that while the tangerine tree has not grown up yet, you already die from thirst; or the snake in the garden may bite you.

Just like me, I do not know how to plant a tree and my life is very short. I like to say the word ‘tangerine’, so my mother can give it to me; I can immediately taste the sweet flavor of the tangerine and absorb its sweet flavor and nutrition. I am also thankful to the hard labor of the farmer. I believe in the vow and the practice of the farmer’s accomplishment. I have faith in my mother’s words, simple and easy. After eating the tangerine, I will have the strength to see patients and to serve society. That is very good! Suppose I have no faith, then I will have to work hard from morning to night in the farm to earn a living. This is such a difficult matter.

We had been in this world of evil turbidities for too long. Therefore, it is very hard to have faith in good things or in true principles. If someone tells us that in the Eastern Street, there is a gang name Golden Light. This gang specially plans to cheat others’ out of their money. We will believe it immediately. We will be afraid of these people and dare not go to the East. However, if someone tells us that in the Western World, there are Amitabha Buddha, Guan Shi Yin 68[68] Bodhisattva, and Great Strength Bodhisattva 69[69]. They often emit

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<sup>68</sup>[68] ***Guan Shi Yin Bodhisattva*** (Avalokiteshvara Bodhisattva) Guan Shi Yin means one who contemplates the sounds of the world. This Great Bodhisattva is foremost in compassion among the Bodhisattvas. He contemplates the suffering sounds of living beings throughout the universe and comes to rescue them from miseries. He usually manifests as a beautiful woman. “*Namo Guan Shi Yin Bodhisattva*” means “Homage to the One Who Contemplates the Sounds of the World.”

light and kindly and compassionately rescue living beings, help them to leave the painful sufferings and enjoy eternal peace. On the contrary, we will be doubtful until death and yet we still do not believe. *Why is it that in both scenarios we cannot see, but we believe there is the Golden Light Gang and dare not venture to the East? Why don't we have faith that the Buddhas and the Bodhisattvas are kind, compassionate and have measureless light of wisdom? Why don't we rejoice and believe, so we can go to the West? Our mind had sunk too deep, that we believe only in evil, but not in good, believe only in the false, but not in the truth?* I also believe that people in the Golden Light Gang also has Buddha nature. If they change their mind and recite Amitabha Buddha, they will become Buddhas. Kind and compassionate Amitabha Buddha will not let go off them. I also believe the Golden Light Gang in my inner mind such as Greed, Anger, and Stupidity one day will also emit light as Amitabha Buddha.

I would like to introduce the story of Aunt Pan Xie Ying Mei. One night before the New Year as I opened the examination room and prepared to go home, I saw a young man who said that they came from America to visit his mother-in-law who was in a car accident. She had told them one year ago about her passing. She said that when she passed away, they needed to invite Reverend Master Chan Yun and close lotus friends in the Lotus Society to help her with recitation. They did phone to the Lin Ren Temple, but could not find the Reverend Master. Someone told them to look for me for help. I heard that she had received the Bodhisattva Precepts and recited the Buddha's name vigorously. She told her children not to move her body after death and no crying. They must help her to recite the Buddha's name. I thought, *"She cultivated so diligently, but still had a car accident. Much less is a person like me."* Thus, I needed to hurry up to help her with the recitation, to fulfill her vow, and to help her reborn. When I got to the hospital, her children were talking on the phone about her funeral. I realized the sufferings of all living beings that are still on the turning wheel of birth, age, sick, and death. She lied unconsciously for a few days in the Emergency Room. However, she shed tears when we recited the Buddha's name for her. That night the friends from the Lotus Society had not finished their dinner when receiving the news. They enthusiastically came over to help her husband to prepare and to explain clearly about the recitation procedure. Her children were very filial, and they wanted to fulfill her vow to reborn to the West. They hid away all the pictures of family members and relatives that were hanging on the wall, so that she would not attach to the Saha World anymore. She passed away on New Year's Eve. There were forty friends from the Lotus Society who came to help with the recitation, but none of them knew her previously. I was deeply moved when I saw a piece of paper that has her vow written on it; that paper had been yellowed by the incense smoke (the vow poem in the Chapter of Universal Worthy 70[70] Bodhisattva's Practice and Vows). 71[71] Her children mentioned

<sup>69</sup>[<sup>69</sup>] **Great Strength Bodhisattva** is another important Great Bodhisattva in the Pure Land (Land of Ultimate Bliss). He and Guan Shi Yin Bodhisattva assist Amitabha Buddha to teach, to transform living beings, and to take them to the Pure Land.

<sup>70</sup>[<sup>70</sup>] **Universal Worthy (Samantabhadra) Bodhisattva** (also known as **Vajradhara** and **Viśvabhadra** (the different names foreground different attributes and essence-qualities), **Wylie:** *Kun-tu bzang-po*, **Mgl:** *Qamugha Sain*, **Chn:** **Pinyin:** *Pūxián púsà* **Wade-Giles:** *P'u<sup>3</sup> hsien<sup>2</sup> p'u<sup>2</sup> sa<sup>4</sup>*, **JP:** *Fugen bosatsu*, **Viet:** *Phổ Hiền Bồ Tát*) is the Lord of the Truth in Buddhism, who represents the practice and meditation of all Buddha's. Together with Shakyamuni and fellow disciple Manjusri he forms the Shakyamuni trinity. He is the patron of the **Lotus Sutra** and, according to the **Avatamsaka Sutra**, made the ten great vows, which are the basis of a bodhisattva. Samantabhadra is most commonly described as a bodhisattva himself, although some esoteric traditions regard him as a primordial Buddha.

<sup>71</sup>[<sup>71</sup>] **Universal Worthy Bodhisattva's Practice and Vows** refer to the Ten Kingly Practices-and-Vows of Universal Worthy Bodhisattva. He is another important Great Bodhisattva who is foremost in practice among the Bodhisattvas. See note 32 for more.

that previously, she used to help out with the recitation. She wrote down the names of people whom she knew could help her with the recitation. However, on New Year's Eve, some of them went back home. Others were busy and could not come. Her children were worried that no one would come, but unexpectedly, there were many unknown people enthusiastically came to help her with the recitation. Indeed, cause and effect are not off. People reciting Buddha's name only need to cultivate the cause. Proper 'cause' will certainly bring forth proper 'effect'.

Oriental people tend to be afraid of a funeral on the New Years, especially on New Year's Eve, but Buddhists do not mind. We only hope that there will be another one to attain rebirth and to become a Buddha, then he can save limitless living beings. We only concern that family members will lose their 'faith' and 'vow' while they are sad. After cremation, she left a few relics with green, yellow, and white colors. Her husband was deeply touched. Previously, he used to complain: *"I am so poor because you give everything away and do not cook meat and fish for me to eat!"* (From this point, we can tell what type of person she is). He continued, *"Each time I watched TV, she sat cross-legged and used the end of the incense sticks to count the numbers of Buddha recitation. I blamed her many times, but unexpectedly, she cultivated successfully!"* One inconceivable thing I felt was that of her beads. They were made from the seeds of 'Essence Moon Bodhi'. Two seeds remained intact and unburned after the cremation. Her son, daughter, and son-in-law were PhD's in America. They also said it was unimaginable. Honestly recite the Buddha's name and vigorous cultivation will bring success. *Cause-and-effect is not off by a penny.*

In the past, there was one disciple who asked the Buddha: *"If one dies suddenly, can one reborn [to the Pure Land]?"* The Buddha gave an example: *"If there is a tree growing toward the East, it will fall toward the East if it breaks."* Reciting the Buddha's name is just like the tree growing toward the West. Everyday, it is growing up toward the West. If it breaks off, it will fall toward the West. *We must ask ourselves, do we turn toward the West yet?* (I am afraid not yet). Our minds usually turn toward the four quarters, the eight directions, and jump all over. They do not point toward the West. Of twenty-four hours in a day, the time we recite the Buddha's name sincerely is no more than five minutes. For those who are a little more diligent, they can recite a few hours in a day. However, of that few hours, we do not know how many recitations are proper (*proper means continuous and without false thoughts*). Therefore, this tree grows disorderly; if the tree breaks suddenly, it is hard to tell which direction it will fall down.

In her diary, she already left a will to remind her children how to take care of her passing. Her children found that later on. Fortunately, her funeral was carried out according to her will. One section in the diary gave me a deep impression. She had a son, who was once the Chairman of Fung Jia University, and passed away due to car accident. At the time, she had not studied Buddhism yet and realized the pains in human life. She wrote, *"Today is the day I part forever away from my son, and it is the most painful day in my life."* A mother suffered the pains of 'people with white hairs sending off people with dark hairs.' 72[72] How ironic it was! An extraordinary person would not bury the head in the painful sufferings and lament day and night. From the sufferings of 'birth, age, death, love but separated, hate but encountered,

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<sup>72[72]</sup> *People with white hairs sending off people with dark hairs:* This is a Chinese saying refers to the older people lament for the loss of their younger children.

and the five scorching skandhas’, that person will get enlighten and follow the footsteps of the ancient sages. Let us turn toward the eternal and endless Amitabha Dharma Assembly, turn toward the pure, rejoicing, bright and full of laughing sounds of the Lotus Pool Sea-like Assembly. 73[73] Great Dharma Master Yin Guang 74[74] had said:

*Make vow for rebirth now.*

*Do not attach to the foreign lands, mountains and springs.*

*Unwilling to return, but if willing we will get there.*

*Once at home, who will compete for the wind and the moon?*

We should not wander anymore. Let us study the spiritual world of Great Dharma Master Hong Yi; 75[75] “*Flowers are in full bloom in spring, the heavenly mind and the moon are perfect.*” Recite Buddha’s name seriously and properly. The Method of Buddha Recitation is the most special method among the 84,000 Methods that Shakyamuni Buddha taught. This is the most successful Method. Recite everyday until we become so sincere just like young children often sing:

*“The train quickly flies, the train quickly flies, flies over the high mountain, flies over the springs...”*

While reciting the Buddha’s name, the mind passes through many difficulties similar to crossing the high mountain, crossing over the springs. Similar to the singing: “*Gentle mother sees and so happy.*” Amitabha Buddha, our father with the endless and boundless compassion, had opened wide his hands for a long time, for a very long time. Seeing us to return home, he is overjoyed. Think about the “*Bodhisattvas are greeting and rejoicing, Amitabha is waiting at the door.*” These sounds reflect from afar, so why don’t we walk faster.

Turn the head to see all the images of life and death on the bank of the Ganges River; we are similar to those who are drowning. The Buddhas and the Bodhisattvas compassionately jump into the water of life-and-death that is full of painful sufferings. They teach us to use the name ‘Amitabha Buddha’ to attain the state of neither birth nor extinction of our self-nature, to turn the dirty and turbid water into the river of pure and saintly good, and to turn the hot and bitter waves into sweet fragrance.

*“Cannot stand to let livings beings suffer, cannot stand to let the sagely teaching declines.”* Make the vow that we will bring forth the kind and compassionate mind. We often follow the great vows of Amitabha Buddha to save all living beings. A vow that living beings will reborn to the adorned Lotus Pool Sea-like Assembly and together, enjoy the rain of Mandarava 76[76] Flowers...

Everyone, please forgive me; I often do not have any good content to offer to you, but to retell a few sad stories for you. I do not want you to memorize the bloody tears in these stories,

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<sup>73[73]</sup> **Lotus Pool Sea-Like Assembly.** This refers to the Great Sagely Assembly in the Pure Land. It is also called the Great Pure Sea-like Assembly, because there are so many sagely residents in this land and no one can calculate their numbers.

<sup>74[74]</sup> **Yin Guang.** This is the 13th Buddhist Patriarch well known for his cultivation in Buddha Recitation practice (the Pure Land School).

<sup>75[75]</sup> **Hong Yi (1880-1942).** Another famous Buddhist monk in the Pure Land School

<sup>76[76]</sup> **Mandarava Flowers.** These are sacred flowers from the heavens. During the Buddha’s time, the sages from heavens make offerings of these heavenly flowers to the Buddha.

but only vow that all of you will soon walk on the enlightened road. We must be the ‘first-rated horse’ and do not wait for the painful sufferings to get to us before running. The first-rated horse is the one that runs immediately as soon as it sees the shadow of the horsewhip. *See others suffered, know that life has those sufferings, do not wait anymore, let’s quickly cultivate!* The second-rated horse is the one that waits for the whip to hit before willing to run. The third-rated horse is the one that waits until being severely beaten and bleeding, or skin peeled off before willing to run. The fourth-rated horse is the one that does not run regardless of how severely beaten it is, even until the pains get into the bones. Possibly, there is the fifth-rated horse that is not in fear of death. This kind will cause the Bodhisattvas to shed their tears.

One Dharma friend suggested to me that I should not lecture today and invite someone else to lecture instead. (Conveniently, I would like to report to all the Dharma friends). As we mentioned previously, we are all in the river of life-and-death. The images that we see on the Ganges River are our own shadows. All the patients and I are similar. We all have cancer. Now, it is time for me to single-mindedly recite the Buddha’s name to prepare for rebirth. I agreed to talk to you all today (April 27) because Uncle Xu had phoned many times, and he was extremely sincere. I would give a talk even if there is only one person comes to listen. If having one more person to recite the Buddha’s name for rebirth to the Land of Ultimate Bliss, the world will have one less person to suffer tearfully.

Moreover, I had met many Head Masters 77[77] who “*could not bear to let living beings to suffer, could not bear to let the sagely teachings decline.*” They tried all their strengths to teach us the extremely important principles in Buddhism. Today, I do not have to lament in bed, but to come here to study together with all of you. This is due to their favors and merits. I only want to try all my might (fighting with the pains) to repay part of their kindness and favor.

In the Exposition of the Perfection of Great Wisdom 78[78], one Bodhisattva said: ‘*I had lost my body in the countless life-and-death kalpas, but not because of the Dharma’ (not sacrifice for the Dharma). Is it true?* ‘Turn the head to see the bones accumulated into mountain’. Innumerable, we lost our lives in the past although they were as light as the red hair 79[79]; our lives were never as heavy as Mount Taishan 80[80], but we still lost them regardless. For the sake of Buddhadharma and living beings, let us recite the Buddha’s name properly and clearly for rebirth! If there is any little values and sincerity in my words today, I vow to dedicate and to transfer the merits to all the Good-Knowing Advisors, Fathers and Mothers, Teachers, Friends who had reminded me on the cultivation road. I would like to thank you all, thanks for every single sincere sentence, regardless of encouraging or scolding, thanks for every single smile, every sincere tear drop, every single advice. I also would like to dedicate the merits to each ‘Bodhisattva Patient’ of mine, to all living beings that are suffering. I vow that they soon hear the call of Amitabha in their inner mind, and altogether reborn in the place where there is ‘no sufferings, only happiness’ in the Land of Ultimate Bliss.

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<sup>77</sup>[77] **Head Masters.** This is a Buddhist terminology refers to the abbot/abbess of the temple or important Buddhist Patriarchs.

<sup>78</sup>[78] **Exposition of the Perfection of Great Wisdom** (Mahāprajñāpāramitāśāstra commentary written by Patriarch Long Shou). He explained in details on the Sutra of the Great Prajna (Great Wisdom).

<sup>79</sup>[79] **Red Hairs.** This is a Chinese comparison meaning that the value of our life depends on the circumstances. Sometimes, death is not that important. It is as lightly as that of a red hair.

<sup>80</sup>[80] **Taishan** Other times, it is as heavy (as important) as that of Mount Taishan. Taishan is the name of a sacred and important mountain in China. Chinese Emperors of the past went there to worship and to conduct importance ceremonies.

When I went to have an examination, the doctors did not know that I had worked in the same profession as them, so they discussed my conditions together [freely]. I heard and knew very well. I also saw the cancer through the ultrasound machine. The cancer was too big by the time of the examination; it covered almost the entire lower abdomen. I was very embarrassed that I did not know and treat it early. This was too bad. Each time the ‘beeper’ rang, I had to run quickly. Many times, I had to stop whatever I was doing and went to work right away. A few days before the examination, my feet swelled up such that I could not put the shoes on. I tried to put them on as slipper and went to work. Master Li had said, *“If one has ten parts of strengths, but uses only nine then there is not enough sincerity.”*

I do not have any fearful or terrified feelings. I feel very normal and decide that I need to focus on reciting the Buddha’s name for rebirth to the West. I must use the remaining time to do the work that I must finish, and meet the enlightened people from the past until now. One has to have faith in the Buddha Dharma, and to have faith in the first enlightenment taught in the Sutra of the Eight Great Human Enlightenments that *‘the world itself is impermanent.’* If this is the case, then my situation is very normal. There is no need to ask, *“Is it true? How can I contract this disease?”* Patients often asked me that question. And there is no need for crying, *“No. It cannot be me. I cannot get this disease.”* (Patients usually defend themselves). *Why can it not be us?* It is very possible. Or supposedly, it is our turn. Please wake up. Use the remaining time; do not waste and run away anymore!

From the day of birth, we are walking gradually toward death. One lotus friend usually reminded us *“Everyone has one thing that is always working solidly and vigorously. That is right from the moment of birth, we are gradually moving toward the last station of life.”*

In addition, *“If one said that you are growing up, you would be very happy. However, if one said that you are moving toward the tomb, you would be very sad. The truth is both events are the same.”*

Someone asked, *“All of you believe in the Buddha, then how can you have cancer?”*

*Buddhist Sutra stated very clearly that from innumerable kalpa until now, the evil karma that we had created would be limitless and boundless. Suppose the wrongdoings of the mind, language and action have forms and can be measured, then to the end of empty space, it still cannot hold all the karma. If you want to know the cause in past life, just look at what you receive in the present life. If you want to know the events in the future, just look at what you do today.*

From innumerable kalpas until now, I do not know how many living beings had I hurt. How many living beings had I caused to suffer painfully? Now when the retribution appears, I must receive it happily and calmly. We recite the Buddha’s name and must follow the kindness and compassion of the Buddhas. I vow that all living beings that I had hurt previously can bath in the light of kindness and enlightenment. They can neutralize and disentangle all the karmic hatreds in their inner mind and eradicate all, so that there will be no more cycle of vengeance after vengeance. This is the best assistance that the Buddhas and the Bodhisattvas give me. Forget all the blames and unnecessary jealousies, all of those not so nice emotional knots. Suppose tomorrow is the last day, tonight I still have to plant all the lotus flowers in the garden. Underneath the cool wind and the moon, I must recite the holy name of Amitabha Buddha aloud.

There are friends who still do not let go. They keep blaming that the Buddhas and the Bodhisattvas did not protect me and let me get this disease. The truth is that it is not the Buddhas or the Bodhisattvas who make me get this disease. Let us try to think. Place one drop of oil into water, it will float whereas a stone will sink to the bottom. My karmic obstacle is as heavy as the stone. Naturally, it will sink to the bottom, and I will get the disease. Luckily, Amitabha Buddha already prepared the great vows, to take the 'aircraft carrier' to save me and all living beings who have deep and heavy karmic obstacles. Therefore, I am not worry. I only need to have solid faith and vow. Holding and reciting the Buddha's name definitely will get me rebirth. *Was it not true that Great Dharma Master Ou Yi already told us?*

*"Rebirth or not depends on if you have faith and vows,*

*The low or high stage depends on how deep or shallow you recite the Buddha's name."*

Although I have not recited up the level of 'single mind and unconfused' yet, I continue to work hard and believe that Amitabha Buddha will come and receive me. I understand that human life is just like drawing the Buddha. For every single touch, we use our entire sincere mind to draw. Do not put your brush away only to find that the picture you have drawn turns into a wolf, or a pig, or even an evil ghost!

I knew of a patient who was extremely transcendental and taught me many things. She had liver cancer, and came to the hospital because of bleeding in the gastrointestinal tract and not because of treating cancer. That night, I was on call at the hospital. I helped her to insert a tube from the nose to the stomach. I poured some ice water to stop the bleeding and to examine the bleeding site. Normally, when inserting the tube from the nose to the stomach, the majority of patients would complain out of pain. However, she was very calm and natural; no complain at all as if nothing happened. Later, I saw the burning scars on her hands for people who received the precepts, and I realized that she had cultivated for a long time.

That night, there were too many patients, so I had to work continuously until 5 AM. When I passed by her bed, she clasped hands together and said, *"Amitabha Buddha. Hello, doctor."* At that time, she was laying on a temporary bed in the walking hall since there were not enough beds for patients in the hospital. The patients on temporary beds usually complained that "Too many people walk back and forth, and it is too noisy," and "it is not convenient to go to the restroom." However, this lady did not complain at all. She smiled and put her hand together to recite Buddha's name (while being inserted the feeding tube) and said, *"Hence the air is really good. About four o'clock in the early morning, I already finished my morning recitation!"* Hearing that, I was deeply moved. Her heart is so beautiful. Locating in an inconvenient and noisy place and having a very sick body, she still treated everything as "very pure and cool."

We should not look down on the practice to recite Amitabha Buddha during this time (let's try to insert a tube in the nose and see if you can recite). Everyday, if we want to recite up to this level, we must clean up all the afflictions of false thoughts coming up in our mind (suppose we want to recite continuously, then we must have recitation after recitation to break through the siege. Each recitation must have victory and win over all the false thoughts). Much more so is the moment when we are in the most painful of sufferings! If you want to have one recitation of Amitabha Buddha with 'the body and the mind blended into one', do you realize that you must have very strong mind power to overcome all the sufferings and

difficulties? Therefore, one recitation of the Buddha name and a few sentences of her moved me to tears. I examined her painful area and felt that her liver had harden and swollen up. I suspected it was cancer. The next day, ultrasound and diagnostic tests showed that her cancerous area in the liver had enlarged to 8 cm. Because of her attitude and manifestation unlike others, I told her the truth about her conditions (usually we have to think carefully before talking to patients).

A person who truly studied Buddhism will consider life and death is very normal. What we are afraid of the most is that our wisdom does not open. This life will be in confusion and upside down. After death, we will continue to reborn in the Turning Wheel of The Six Paths 81[81]. Once we understand this principle clearly, we will not complain to the Heaven and the Earth; we will recite the Buddha's name properly. We put our feet on the road to the homeland and prepare to participate in the Sea-like Assembly. This is the best 'protection'. The sad and painful conditions are sufferings for others. However, with us, we happily consider that they are normal. These are the gifts of the Buddhas and the Bodhisattvas! Ten millions dollars can buy all kind of treatments (but not without pain and torture), but it cannot buy the peaceful and happy mind. *Which offerings are more valuable than this mind?* When I told the truth about her conditions to her, she replied right away as if she had prepared the words before hand: *"I live one day, I serve living beings one day until the day I pass away, Amitabha Buddha will come and receive me."* She was transcendental like so, full of kindness, compassion and faith. Her spirits deeply engraved in my mind and turned into a power to encourage and to help me to overcome many difficult barriers in everyday life.

Honestly speaking, I am not working as a doctor, but I have to say that I am 'learning'. My illness is the most severe among the patients. There are many 'evil things' in my mind: greed, anger, stupidity, arrogance; all are very severe. Each patient manifested a special condition to teach me to understand a certain principle. Everyone was kind and compassionately to teach me. Their lively stories full of blood and tears made me understand the words in the Shurangama Sutra on the Chapter of Great Strength Bodhisattva's Buddha Recitation Penetration, in the section: 'The twelve Tathagathas<sup>82</sup>[82] continued to appear in one kalpa, the last Buddha named Surpassing Sun Moon Light taught me about the Buddha Recitation Samadhi 83[83].'

One teacher said, *"The conditions of Great Strength Bodhisattva are extremely good, so that he can meet all twelve Buddhas and receive the Buddha Recitation Samadhi; we do not meet even one Buddha."* Although my good root is very shallow, but my circumstance is very special, very good! Everyday, there was one Bodhisattva bringing images of the endless sufferings on the Ganges River to wake me up and to help me with enlightenment. Recite the Buddha's name; recite the Buddha's name. They helped me to prepare the mind power, helped

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<sup>81</sup>[81] **Turning wheel of the Six Paths.** Buddhists believe that living beings just simply born and die in the six paths. They keep cycle themselves in the six paths. The six paths are Gods, Human, Asuras (beings with a big temper and love to fight), Animals, Hungry Ghosts, and Hell Dwellers. Any living being has to cycle through each path unless he/she cultivates successfully and transcend them all as the Buddha himself. Sometimes, it also refers to as the Life-and-Death Cycle.

<sup>82</sup>[82] **Tathagatha (or Tathagata):** refers to one who has attained Supreme Enlightenment. It is one of the ten titles of the Buddha, which he himself used when speaking of himself or other Buddhas. Usually translated as Thus Come One.

<sup>83</sup>[83] **Samadhi** a Sanscrit term that describes a non-dualistic state of consciousness in which the consciousness of the experiencing subject becomes one with the experienced object, and in which the mind becomes still (one-pointed or concentrated) though the person remains conscious (from Wikipedia)

me to let go off things. This is the protection of the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas. Suppose there was no such kind and compassionate protection, just hearing the ‘name of the disease’, my four limbs would shiver immediately. There will be no strengths in hands and legs anymore, and I will cry out: *“Vengeance and hatreds in life are hard to forgive...”*

Sometimes, I saw many people silently prayed before the Buddha statue. *Sometimes, I wanted to ask what do they pray for.* Each person lighted three incense sticks and ‘mumbled, mumbled’ the prayer. Their prayers were surely longer than the 48 great vows of Amitabha Buddha. For example, please help my children healthy and intelligent, so that they can pass the exam into medical schools (it would be best if they can receive the first place!). Please help my son to marry a nice and filial wife. Please help my husband to get lots of money. Please help me to win the lottery jackpot and get a promotion, etc... After making the prayers as long as the Changjiang River 84[84] and the great sea, they took home the fruits that they offered to the Buddha, so that they could eat and get ‘well and safety’. If their wishes were not fulfilled, they blamed that the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas did not help them, but only ‘look’ at the offerings and ‘sniff’ the incense, and were not ‘efficacious’ at all. (The truth is they themselves did not understand the cause and effect, and did not follow the teachings of the Buddha. They were not ‘efficacious’ themselves).

*Let us try to think about what people pray for?* Merely pray for the facial skin to have a little more wrinkles (Looking for longevity, one cannot avoid wrinkled skin and white hairs). Pray for more burdens on the shoulders (In praying for a house full of children, one will have more afflictions). Pray for some more obstacles in life (worry about fame and profit, about ‘getting’ or ‘losing’). People only pray to receive the petty things. The truth is the Dharma powers of the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas are immense and boundless. They can give us the wonderful and eternal protection. They give us a wisdom key to open the endless treasure of our self-nature and get endless happiness. This happiness will not lose by changing of circumstances. No one can steal or rob it; it also is not lost. This key is to recite ‘*Namo Amitabha Buddha*’. We only need to receive and to open sincerely. Every one has this endless treasure!

I am sick, someone said, *“As a vegetarian, you lack nutrients, therefore you get sick.”* The truth is that we only need to compare and will know that vegetarian is healthy and long-lived. Just like in previous section, we talked about Venerable Masters Hsu Yun, Guang Qin, and Master Li. These three were extremely healthy and long-lived. However, being vegetarian is not to look for longevity, but we do not want out of the short-lived pleasure of the three-inched tongue, we will bring about the fear of losing lives and the extreme sufferings to living beings. Each cattle shivered with fear and shed tears waiting to be butchered. Each captured bird had its mother waiting for it to fly home. We have never heard or seen any chicken voluntarily lengthened its neck for butchering, feather plucking, and said, *“Very good, I will become a roasted chicken!”* Just like my patients who always struggled in the painful sufferings on the bank of life-and-death, each animal trembled with fears when facing death. If I look down on the lives of others and pay no attention to the painful sufferings of the patients, they certainly will not forgive me. Similarly, if we look down on the painful sufferings of other

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<sup>84[84]</sup> ***Changjiang or Yangtze River.*** This is the name of a famous river in China. It is the longest river in China and the third longest river in the world. In Chinese context, it refers to long speech, talkative, etc...

creatures, they also will not forgive us. If you cut one of its legs, it will look for ways to break one of your legs. Thus vengeance after vengeance, we become each other's karmic creditors and debtors, and we can not escape forever. Everyone suffers endlessly in this knot of karmic vengeance!

I heard one Dharma master told a true story like this: one day somebody carried a baby in the cradle and went to visit Venerable Master Guang Qin. The baby was very cute and lovely. Everyone liked to play with the baby. Only the Venerable Master's face looked serious and was sad when seeing the baby. He told the disciples, "*He comes to collect the debts.*" (referring the baby). Everyone did not understand. The Venerable Master asked these people, "*You are in the business of selling frozen chicken; aren't you? Look at the baby.*" The father and mother of the baby burst into tears. They nodded their heads and pulled the baby's shirt out. Although the baby had a very cute face, his lower body was exactly like that of a chicken! The Venerable Master kept urging them to change occupation. They replied, "*We already spent thirty millions yuan in the freezing system, it is very hard to change.*"

I thought the profits from this business are probably not enough to pay medical bills for the baby. Much less was to compensate for the flowing tears.... (I knew many patients who had similar situations). However, the majority of people would rather endure the sufferings, or lose their wealth later on, and even lose the happiness in life, but they would not let go of the profits at hand, and the desires of the mouth and the belly. The Venerable Master was the person with the Dharma eye. He just looked at and saw right through the causes and effects. He tried wholeheartedly to advise, *but not that many people believed and followed!*

People usually pray to the Buddha for help, but have no faith in the Buddha's words. How strange! Regardless, if today a famous physician tells me that I should 'change to eat meat' and do not eat vegetarian food anymore, then he will cure my disease. [Even if that is true] I am not willing to sacrifice the lives of chicken, pigs, goats, and cattle's to cause sufferings for them. Much less is no single famous doctor can confirm that eating meat will 'lengthen one's life' than eating vegetarian food. Regardless of how famous the doctors are, they will die. *They cannot guarantee that eating meat can help a person to live long, so how can they guarantee for me?* I only believe in the Buddha's teaching and the wisdom of the Buddha. Today [if I eat meat] I can get some more 'proteins' and 'fat' from animal meat, but I cannot compensate for their painful sufferings. I cannot comfort their horror and wipe clean the tears of their mothers for the loss of their children. One day, they will come back to seek revenge. Cause-and-effect of people is very complicated, but it is not off by a bit. The flesh eyes of ordinary living beings like us can only see one, but not two. We often take the 'wrongs' for the 'rights'. (In the old days, Nicolaus Copernicus (1473-1534) said that the earth is round and almost lost his life in the process. If we talk about the cause-and-effect, retribution, and the revolving six paths, and someone slanders us as 'superstitious', that is only a 'small matter.').

Realistically, the word 'karmic creditors' does not necessarily refer to someone 'wear dark eyeglasses, smoke cigarettes, hold the gun, full of evil energy, walk to your front door to collect the debts.' Karmic creditors can take many forms. Possibly, it might be a pretty girl whom you just meet, but she already takes away 'your soul'. Without thinking, you give money to that person to spend frivolously. When the money is all gone, that person will leave

you, make you sad, and sorrowful all your life. It might be someone that you just meet, but you get upset immediately. Your face reddens and you argue with that person. Finally, it increases your blood pressure, bleeds in the head, and you die out of a sudden. We must believe in the words full of wisdom of the Buddhas and the Bodhisattvas; we must avoid hurting and creating karmic vengeance with living beings because all the painful sufferings will come back to us. Usually, we cannot regret fast enough. We must determine to always create good affinities, to open wisdom of the self-nature and to unleash the endless source of happiness. *Is it much better doing so?* Such people are just like Venerable Master Guang Qin and Master Li. They are missed by everyone; everyone will ask ‘*why do they leave too soon?*’ even if they had lived for a hundred years. *Why don’t they live to 200 years, so that my grand children and great grand children will have the opportunity to meet them?* These people’s lifespan are forever not enough for everyone. For the majority, if somebody has a serious disease, everybody will complain that he ‘prolongs’ his lives too long, so that he ‘drag’ his entire family almost to fall down. Speaking so, then ‘longevity’ does not depend on the ‘number of years.’ We must live a life that everyone laments that it is too short, but do not ‘prolong’, so everyone complains that it is too long.

Realistically, *how do we live a good life?* We must listen to the Buddha’s teaching and those who had attained enlightenment in the past. We must sincerely recite the Buddha’s name! Use our inconceivable, boundless, and immense mind nature to recite the inconceivable holy name of the Measureless Life, Measureless Light Amitabha Buddha. Each recitation will produce a sound to escape the worldly turbidities! Let us pledge that we use the extremely solid faith and vow to adorn every single holy name of Amitabha Buddha. Each recitation overcomes all the afflictions. Each recitation has full self-mastery light. Each recitation shows the clear sky and the bright moon. Use this inconceivable holy name to enter and to understand the measureless light and longevity of the self-nature. Just like Patriarch Ou Yi had said, “*Change the kalpa turbidity into pure Sea-like Assembly; change the view turbidity into measureless light; change the affliction turbidity into permanent still light; change the living beings turbidity into lotus-born beings; change the life turbidity into measureless longevity*”. Let us vow that with each sincere Buddha’s recitation, we earnestly tame the mighty rolling waves of the ‘Life-and-Death’ Ganges River and plant them fully with lotus flowers.

Namo Amitabha Buddha.

*During the process of translation, certainly there are some errors, please happily forgive us.*

*Sincerely thank you!*

*One group of Wonderful Sound Laypeople, April 9, 1991*