



# Pure Land Chan

DISCOURSES OF CHAN MASTERS ON PURE LAND PRACTICE

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**Pure Land Buddhism** is the most common school of Buddhism practiced in East Asia. It is centered around the figure of the Buddha Amitabha (Buddha of Infinite Light) who, as a young monk made a vow to establish a Pure Land where there will be no obstructions to practicing and conditions will be perfect for achieving enlightenment. The entry criterion is simple: even if you were to recollect his name even once with full attention and sincerity, you're in. It is this infinite compassion with which he is primarily associated, and for which he is so widely beloved. In the Sutras (Buddhist texts) which describe Amitabha and his Pure Land, Buddha Shakyamuni (the historical Buddha) teaches in extraordinary detail about each characteristic of the Buddha Amitabha, his Pure Land Sukhavati ('Boundless Bliss') and its current and potential occupants. The culmination is a teaching of a series of 13 visualisations, a potent mindfulness practice which demands a very high degree of concentration and imagination - single pointed thought. In Chinese Buddhism, Pure Land and Chan (Jap. Zen) are very often mixed and the lines between the schools are strongly blurred. Many of the famous Chan masters, such as Hanshan Deqing, Yunqi Zhuhong and later Xuyun Xingche and Nan Huaijin advocated 'Nianfo Chan', where the practitioner first perfects Buddha-Recitation or Buddha-Recollection, a practice used since the time of Shakyamuni Buddha, where one repeats a Buddha's name single-mindedly (Amitufo, Amitufo, Amitufo, etc.). This is praised by many a master as the easiest technique for achieving Samadhi (full meditative concentration). Once Samadhi is stable, the Chan practitioner then asks the Huatou (existential doubt-inducing question) "Who is reciting the Buddha's name?" and thus directs the attention to her True Nature/ Self Nature/ Buddha Nature which is thereafter penetrated into, producing an insight into Ultimate Reality. The Pure Mind is the Pure Land, and Amitabha, Infinite Light is our very own True Nature. Seen from a different angle, Pure Land Masters from the first Chinese patriarch Huiyuan Lushan to the 20th Century Patriarch Yin Kuang also expounded that Buddha-Recitation Samadhi and single minded recollection of the Buddha bring about the true understanding of the Pure Land. So is there a real Buddha Amitabha and a real Pure Land? In our current deluded state, we confuse what is real and what is false all time anyway. Physics has explained long ago that this device in front of your eyes is in fact a symphony of atoms vibrating in space, yet you insist that there is in fact a real and solid 'device'. So, just like that, all is real and all is unreal. Just as "real" as your device. But if you recite without interruption, whatever you are doing and wherever you are, you will see for yourself what the masters meant when they said that "Every day is a good day, and every place is the Pure Land".

Upasaka ShenJing, July 2018

# The Important Doctrines of Pure Land and Zen

*EXCERPTS FROM MASTER HAN-SHAN'S DREAM ROAMINGS*

Translated by Dharma Master Lok

To those who engage in the [dual practice] of Buddha Recitation and Zen should take the name of Amitabha Buddha as a hua-t'ou [or kung-an]. During Buddha Recitation, you should ask "who is it that recites the Buddha's name?" If you ask and investigate again and again, there will come a time when all false thoughts suddenly cease. No such thoughts can arise, or if they do, they will be quickly suppressed. You will have only a single, clear thought, like a bright sun in the sky, and never engender any false thought. The confused mind will reign no more. Rather, you will experience stillness and awareness. The Great Master Yung-Chia said: To be still and alert is correct, while to be still and unaware of what is going on around you is wrong. To be alert and still is correct, while to be alert but filled with disturbing thoughts is wrong. If stillness does not lead to lack of mindfulness and awareness does not lead to confused thinking, then awareness and stillness will flow together. You let go of both "sinking" and "floating" until not a single thought arises in mind, not of past, present or future; then, suddenly the pitch blackness cracks and you see your Original Face. Body, mind and world are immediately at peace, like illusory flowers falling from the sky. Everything in the Ten Directions is bright because a great light is shining everywhere. When you arrive at this stage, this complete brightness is always present in your daily life and you will no longer have any doubts. You will believe your own mind, which is intrinsically thus. Then your mind is no different from the Buddhas' and Patriarchs'. When you reach this level, you will no longer grasp at Emptiness. If you grasp at Emptiness, you will fall into evil and heterodox views. Nor will you grasp at Existence or at the Wonderful. If you grasp at Existence, you will also fall into evil ways.



If during practice, you find some realm, whether wholesome or evil, appearing in the mind, you must not grasp at it but just let it be. Then the realm will vanish. You should neither fear evil realms nor take delight in auspicious realms when they appear, for this is the action of demons. If worry or joy arise, these are the views of demons. You should understand that these realms come from your own mind and not from outside. You must understand that our minds are intrinsically clean and pure, without a single dharma, neither confused nor awakened. We

belong neither to this world nor to the realm of the holy, nor to any other realm. But, because we are at present confused, we must cultivate to reduce ignorance and bad habits. If anyone could open up his own mind – originally bright, all-encompassing, clean and pure – that would be Wonderful Suchness and there would be no need for practice. However, because today’s cultivators have not yet seen their Self-Nature (Mind), they must practice diligently in order to reach the stage where they can end the cycle of Birth and Death.



Buddha Shakyamuni taught the Dharma of Mind. There are countless Dharma methods, but they are all for the purpose of awakening the mind. The very important method of Zen has been established by some Patriarchs, but Buddha Shakyamuni Himself taught the Bodhisattvas of the Three Worthy Positions and the Ten Stages [that is, all Bodhisattvas] the crucial method of Buddha Recitation to attain Buddhahood. In short, practice Buddha Recitation to become a Buddha. The Bodhisattvas of the Ten Stages have already attained the level of True Thusness. Can you say that they are not awakened? Yet even they can never depart from Mindfulness of the Buddhas, the Dharma and the Sangha. (Mindfulness of the Buddhas = Buddha Recitation ;). [In the Avatamsaka Sutra,] the youth Sudhana visited fifty-three Good Spiritual Advisors. The first was the monk Cloud of Virtue, who taught him the liberation method of Buddha Recitation. The last one he visited was the Bodhisattva Samantabhadra, who taught him that to attain Wonderful Enlightenment, he need only turn towards the Western Pure Land, behold the Tathagata of Infinite Light (Amitabha Buddha) and receive a prediction of Enlightenment. Take note of this: even the supreme teaching of the Avatamsaka Sutra, which encompasses the entire Dharma realm, also promotes Buddha Recitation. The Bodhisattvas of the Ten Stages, even those who have already attained True Thusness, still practice mindfulness of the Buddhas (Buddha Recitation).



There are those in this Dharma-Ending Age who dare to deprecate Buddha Recitation as an inferior practice. But why should they think that Zen and Pure Land are different? Such people lack knowledge and fail to understand the intent of the Buddhas. They are creating a false dichotomy. According to Mind-Only Pure Land, if the mind is pure, the land is pure. Therefore, if you are a beginning Zen practitioner and have not yet awakened, unless you engage in Buddha Recitation, you have no means of purifying your mind. But, a pure mind is precisely an

awakened mind. Even Bodhisattvas who are already awakened still practice Buddha Recitation, because without Buddha Recitation (mindfulness of the Buddhas) they cannot attain correct Enlightenment. We know that the Patriarchs awakened their minds through mindfulness of the Buddhas. Anyone who practices Buddha Recitation single-mindedly and without distraction will find that all afflictions vanish. With their minds thus bright, they are called awakened. Look at it this way: Buddha Recitation is Zen. No Bodhisattva abandons mindfulness of the Buddhas after awakening. None of the Patriarchs abandoned the Pure Land either. Thus, Buddha Recitation is Zen, Zen is Buddha Recitation. Since ancient times, this question has remained unsettled; I want to speak out now and shatter the view that Pure Land and Zen are different. If all the Buddhas were to appear in the world, they would say the same thing: to abandon this Pure Land Dharma and embrace false words is the work of demons and not the true Dharma.



# Pure Land Teachings of Master Zhuhong

Translated by J.C. Cleary

## General Advice

### 1. Remembering Buddha

The Pure Land teaching began with the World Honored One Shakyamuni Buddha, and has been disseminated through the generations of sage worthies.

They have divided the one gate of Buddha-remembrance into four types: Buddha-remembrance through reciting the name [of Amitabha Buddha], Buddha-remembrance through contemplating the image [of Amitabha Buddha], Buddha-remembrance through contemplating the concept [of Buddha], and reality- aspect (real mark) Buddha-remembrance.

Though there are differences among the four types, ultimately they all go back to reality- aspect Buddha-remembrance. Moreover, the first three types can be grouped as two: contemplating the concept, and reciting the name. [Buddha-remembrance through] contemplating the concept is explained in detail in the Sixteen Contemplations Sutra (Meditation Sutra). Here I will discuss reciting the name. The Amitabha Sutra says:

If a person recites the name of Amitabha Buddha single-mindedly for [a period of time] one or two up to seven days without allowing anything to confuse the mind, at the end of that person's life

Amitabha Buddha and a multitude of holy ones will appear before him. As the person dies, his mind will not be deluded, and he will attain rebirth in Amitabha Buddha's land of ultimate bliss.

This is the great [scriptural] source from which for myriad generations has come [the practice of] Buddha-remembrance by reciting the name, the wondrous teaching personally communicated from the golden mouth [of Buddha]. An ancient worthy said:

As they contemplate the subtleties of the inner truth of phenomena, the minds of sentient beings are mixed [with other concerns than truth]. Since they practice contemplation with mixed minds, the contemplative state of mind is hard to achieve. The Great Sage [Buddha] took pity on them, and encouraged them to

concentrate on the recitation of the Buddha-name. Because it is easy to invoke the Buddha-name, there starts to be some continuity [to their Buddha-remembrance].

This teaches that the work of Buddha-remembrance through reciting the name is most essential for being born in the Pure Land. If by reciting the name one arrives at the reality-aspect, then this has the same efficacy as subtle contemplation. Beings of the highest caliber must not doubt this.

All you children of Buddha here today, [I tell you this]: in the gate of repentance, everyone must repent - even the sages of the vehicles of the disciples [Sravakas] and the solitary [pratyeka] buddhas, even the great beings of complete mind [bodhisattvas], even those of enlightenment equal to the buddhas, all must still repent. Since they all must equally repent, don't they all have to be born in the Pure Land? How much the more so for those at the stage of ordinary mortals and those in the stage of study!

To all of you here today, disciples and others, whatever plane of existence you are in, I respectfully offer [this teaching] to you: all of you must wholeheartedly invoke the Buddha- name, and seek birth in the Pure Land. I hope that Buddha's compassion will extend down especially to you, and gather you in and save you.



## 2. A General Call to Remember Buddha

The Amitabha Sutra says:

'If people are mindful of Buddha, at death they are sure to be born in the Pure Land.'

The Sixteen Contemplations Sutra (Meditation Sutra) says:

'People in all categories who practice Buddha-remembrance are born in the Pure Land. '

Thus with this method of Buddha-remembrance, it does not matter whether you are male or female or a monk or nun or layperson, it does not matter whether your social status is high or low, or whether you are virtuous or stupid. As long as the single-minded [remembrance of Buddha] is not confused, all categories of people will go to the Pure Land, according to how much they practice [Buddha-



remembrance]. So we know that there is not one person in the world unworthy of Buddha-remembrance.

If people are rich and high ranking, receiving the use of everything ready-made, they should practice Buddha-remembrance.

If people are poor and destitute, with small families and few relations, they should practice Buddha-remembrance.

If people have children to remember them at their clan shrines, they should practice Buddha-remembrance.

If people are childless, and live alone on their own, they should practice Buddha-remembrance.

If people's children are filial, so they are secure receiving their support, they should practice Buddha-remembrance.

If people's children are rebellious, and feel no gratitude or love, they should practice Buddha-remembrance.

If people are free from sickness, they should take advantage of their good health to practice Buddha-remembrance.

If people are infirm, and closely pressed by impermanence, they should practice Buddha-remembrance.

If people are old, and do not have much time left, they should practice Buddha-remembrance.

If people are young in years, with spirit still pure and sharp, they should practice Buddha-remembrance.

If people are at leisure, without cares to trouble their minds, they should practice Buddha-remembrance.

If people are busy, and can only steal a little free time from the press of business, they should practice Buddha-remembrance.

If people have left home [to become monks or nuns], and wander free of outside material considerations, they should practice Buddha-remembrance.

If people are living as householders, then knowing that [worldly life is as impermanent as] a house on fire, they should practice Buddha-remembrance.

If people are intelligent, and clearly understand the Pure Land, they should practice Buddha-remembrance.

If people are stupid and dull, and can do nothing else, they should practice Buddha-remembrance.

If people maintain discipline, the discipline which is the order of the Buddha, they should practice Buddha-remembrance.

If people read the sutras, the sutras which are the words of the Buddha, they should practice Buddha-remembrance.

If people study Zen, Zen which is the mind of the Buddha, they should practice Buddha-remembrance.

If people awaken to the Path, the awakening that must be witnessed by the Buddha, they should practice Buddha-remembrance.

I encourage all people everywhere as a matter of great urgency to practice Buddha-remembrance. All categories of people will be born in the Pure Land: the [lotus] flower will open and they will see Buddha.

Seeing the Buddha, hearing the Dharma, in the end they will become enlightened. Only then will they know that their own inherent mind was all along fundamentally Buddha.



### 3. Universal Encouragement to Buddha-Remembrance

Studying Buddhism is not a matter of adornments and formalistic practices: the only thing that is important is genuine cultivation of practice. Buddhist laypeople who live at home do not need to dress like monks and nuns. People who keep their hair can make a constant practice of Buddha-remembrance: they do not need to abide by the daily schedules of monks and nuns.

People who like quiet can practice Buddha-remembrance [alone] in silence: they do not have to form groups and create associations [for the purpose].

People who fear untoward events can practice Buddha-remembrance [at home] behind closed door: they do not have to go to temples to hear the scriptures.

People who know how to read can practice Buddha-remembrance according to the scriptural teachings.

Burning incense [in temples] far and wide is not as good as sitting peacefully in a hall at home practicing Buddha-remembrance.

Serving misguided teachers is not as good as being obedient and filial to one's parents and practicing Buddha-remembrance.

Making widespread connections with deluded friends is not as good as preserving one's purity alone and practicing Buddha-remembrance.

Storing up merit for future lives is not as good as creating merit in the present by practicing Buddha-remembrance.

Making vows and promising expiation [of wrongdoings] is not as good as repenting past faults, undergoing self-renewal and practicing Buddha-remembrance.

Studying non-Buddhist books and texts is not as good as being totally illiterate and practicing Buddha-remembrance.

Engaging in false talk about the principles of Zen without knowledge is not as good as genuinely maintaining discipline and practicing Buddha-remembrance.

Seeking demonic spiritual powers is not as good as having correct faith in cause and effect and practicing Buddha-remembrance.

To express the essential point, an upright mind annihilates evil. If you practice Buddha-remembrance like this, you are called a good person. If you practice Buddha-remembrance while reining in the mind and eliminating scattering, you are called a worthy person. If you practice Buddha-remembrance while enlightening your mind and cutting off delusion, you are called a sage.

I urge people who are completely at leisure to practice Buddha-remembrance. You have finished arranging marriages for your daughters. Your sons and grandsons are taking care of family business. You are secure and at leisure with no concerns. You should practice Buddha-remembrance with your whole mind and your whole strength. Every day recite the Buddha-name several thousand times, or even several tens of thousands of times.

I urge people who are half at leisure and half busy to practice Buddha-remembrance. You are half through, half not through: sometimes you are busy, sometimes you are at leisure. Though you are not totally at leisure, when you are busy you should take care of business, and when you have free time, you should practice Buddha-remembrance. Every day recite the Buddha-name several hundred times, or several thousand times.

I urge people who are completely busy to practice Buddha-remembrance. You are working on government affairs, or else running around taking care of family business. Though you have no free time, you still must steal a bit of free time amidst your busy life and practice Buddha-remembrance. Every day recite the Buddha-name ten times in the morning, and several hundred times during the day.



# The Dharma-Door of Mindfulness of the Buddha

LECTURES BY VENERABLE MASTER HSUAN HUA

Edited and Translated by the Editorial Committee of the  
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## **Amitabha Buddha: The Great King of Dharma.**

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 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 who recite 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.



## **Gathering All Beings into the Western Land.**

The *Amitabha Sutra* belongs to the category of Sutras that the Buddha "spoke without request." Why was that Sutra spoken without request? No one understood this Dharma-door, and so no one could request the Buddha to speak it. Although the greatly wise Shariputra was an interlocutor in the assembly, even he didn't know how to ask about this Dharma-door. Probably the Buddha couldn't hold back any longer, so he told everyone about this most convenient, most direct, most satisfying, easiest, and most inexpensive Dharma-door of reciting the Buddha's name. If a person can recite Amitabha Buddha's name "whether for one day, two

days, three, four, five days, six days, as long as seven days, with one mind unconfused, when this person approaches the end of life, before him will appear Amitabha Buddha and all the assembly of holy ones" to guide him. Although most people find it hard to believe this Dharma-door, it is the most direct and certain practice.

The Dharma-door of reciting the Buddha's name is appropriate for those of all three faculties and beneficial for both the intelligent and the stupid. Whether you are stupid or wise, you can realize Buddhahood. When one is born in the Land of Ultimate Bliss, where beings "endure none of the sufferings, but enjoy every bliss," one will be born transformationally from a lotus. We will not pass through the womb as in the human realm, but will enter a lotus flower, live in it for a while, and then realize Buddhahood.



### **Day and Night Hold the Name with Concentrated, Sincere Mindfulness.**

*The King of All Dharmas is the one word "Amitabha."*

*The five periods and the eight teachings are all contained within it.*

*One who single-mindedly remembers and recites his name*

*In samadhi will enter the Thus Come Ones' place of quiescence.*

*The King of All Dharmas is the one word "Amitabha."/ The five periods and the eight teachings are all contained within it.* The teachings are arranged in eight categories, four according to the nature of the teaching: the storehouse teaching, the connecting teaching, the special teaching, and the perfect teaching; and four according to the methods of teaching: sudden, gradual, secret, and unfixd. The five periods are: The Avatamsaka, Agama, Vaipulya, Prajna, and Lotus-Nirvana. These eight teachings and five periods are all included in the one word "Amitabha."

*One who single-mindedly remembers and recites his name / In samadhi will enter the Thus Come One's place of quiescence.* Such a one will definitely go to the Pure Land of Eternal Stillness and Light, the Land of Ultimate Bliss. Living beings in the Dharma-ending Age will be saved by reciting the Buddha's name. And so whoever hopes to be saved should be mindful of the Buddha.

*Speak one sentence less;  
Recite the Buddha's name one time more.  
Beat your thoughts to death,  
And let your Dharma-body come alive.*

Don't look lightly on the Dharma-door of reciting the Buddha's name.



### **Contemplate at All Times and Reflect Well.**

There are four types of mindfulness of the Buddha:

1. *Mindfulness of the Buddha through holding the name.* This involves reciting "Namo Amitabha Buddha" over and over.

2. *Mindfulness of the Buddha through contemplative reflection.* This means contemplating that:

*Amitabha's body is the color of gold.  
The splendor of his hallmarks has no peer.  
The light of his brow shines 'round five Mount Sumeru.  
Wide as the seas are his eyes, pure and clear.  
Shining in his brilliance by transformation  
Are countless Bodhisattvas and infinite Buddhas.  
His forty-eight vows will be our liberation.  
He enables all those in the nine lotus-stages to reach  
the farthest shore.*

This is mindfulness of the Buddha through contemplative reflection.

3. *Mindfulness of the Buddha through contemplative visualization.* This means reciting "Namo Amitabha Buddha" while facing an image of that Buddha. One should recite the phrase very clearly, hear it very clearly, and keep it very clearly in mind.

4. *Mindfulness of the Buddha's Real Appearance.* This is just Chan meditation. When we meditate, we investigate the question, "Who is reciting the Buddha's name?" We recite "Namo Amitabha Buddha" for two weeks, and then we try to find out who is reciting the Buddha's name. We have to find out "who" and not

lose the "who." If we lose it, then we won't be able to get home. If we can't get home, we won't see Amitabha Buddha.



### **One with Proper Faith, Proper Vows, and Proper Practice.**

Faith, vows, and practice are the three prerequisites of the Pure Land Dharma-door. One who goes on a journey takes along some food and a little money. One who wishes to go to the Land of Ultimate Bliss needs faith, vows, and the practice of holding the Buddha's name.

Faith is the first prerequisite, for without it one will not have an affinity with Amitabha Buddha in the Land of Ultimate Bliss. You must have faith in yourself, faith in the Land of Ultimate Bliss, as well as in cause and effect, noumenon and phenomenon.

What does it mean to believe in oneself? It is to believe that you certainly have the qualifications necessary to be born in the Land of Ultimate Bliss. You should not take yourself lightly and say, "I have committed so many offenses, I can't be born there." Suppose you have created karma involving heavy offenses, well, now you have a good opportunity: you can "take your karma with you into rebirth." That means that regardless of the offenses you have committed in the past, you can still be reborn in the Land of Ultimate Bliss, and that karma goes along with you. However, you need to know that the karma you can take is karma you have already created, not karma that you continue to create. Karma you have already created is the karma from previous lives. Karma you continue to create will ripen in the future. What you can carry is offenses that come from karma created in the past; what you cannot carry is offenses from karma you create now that will ripen in the future. No matter what you have ever done, notwithstanding any kind of offenses, you can now change your faults and reform your conduct, stopping evil and becoming wholesome. Then you can take those previously-created offenses with you to the Land of Ultimate Bliss. But continuing to create karma will keep you from being able to go.

Secondly, you must have faith in the Western Land of Ultimate Bliss which is hundreds of thousands of millions of Buddhalands from here. Before he realized Buddhahood, Amitabha Buddha, as the Bhikshu Dharma Treasury, vowed to create the Land of Ultimate Bliss where living beings of the ten directions who



vowed to be born there could gain rebirth by reciting his name. There is no need to do anything else; it is easy, simple, convenient, and interpenetrating--yet it doesn't cost a thing and doesn't waste energy. This Dharma-door can be considered the highest and most supreme, for if you just recite, "Namo Amitabha Buddha," you will be born in the Land of Ultimate Bliss.

It is also necessary to believe in cause and effect. Believing in cause is to believe that in the past you have planted good roots that now enable you to believe in this Dharma-door. Without good roots, no one can encounter this Dharma-door of reciting the Buddha's name, or any other Dharma-door, for that matter. Because of the good roots you planted in the past, you can now encounter the Pure Land Dharma-door of faith, vows, and holding the name. But if you don't continue to nourish the good roots you planted, then you won't be able to reap the fruition of Bodhi in the future. That is why you must believe in cause and effect; believe that in the past you already planted causes for Bodhi and so in the future you will certainly reap the fruition of Bodhi. The principle is the same as planting a field: the seeds must be watered and nourished before they can grow.

Finally, one must have faith in phenomenon and noumenon. The specific phenomenon is this: Amitabha Buddha has a great affinity with us and will certainly guide us to Buddhahood. The noumenal principle is this: We know the great affinity exists because without it we would not have met the Pure Land Dharma-door. Amitabha Buddha is all living beings and all living beings are Amitabha Buddha. Amitabha Buddha became Amitabha Buddha by reciting the Buddha's name, and if we recite the Buddha's name, we, too, can become Amitabha Buddha.

We should cultivate according to the phenomena and the noumenal principle. The *Avatamsaka Sutra* speaks of four Dharma Realms:

1. The Dharma Realm of Unobstructed Phenomena
2. The Dharma Realm of Unobstructed Noumena
3. The Dharma Realm of Noumena and Phenomena Unobstructed
4. The Dharma Realm of All Phenomena Unobstructed

Considering the four Dharma Realms, and speaking from the standpoint of our self-nature, we and Amitabha Buddha are united in one, and therefore we have the qualifications to realize Buddhahood. Amitabha Buddha is the Amitabha Buddha

within the minds of all living beings, and living beings are the living beings within the mind of Amitabha Buddha. Due to this interconnection, there are phenomena and the noumenon. However, you must believe in this principle and energetically practice it by reciting the Buddha's name; you cannot get lazy. Your recitation of the Buddha's name should increase day by day, not decrease.

Having discussed faith, we will now discuss vows. What is a vow? When you want something, when your thoughts tend toward a certain thing, your mind has a wish, then you make a vow. In Buddhism there are four vast vows:

*I vow to save the limitless living beings.*

*I vow to cut off the inexhaustible afflictions.*

*I vow to study the immeasurable Dharma-doors.*

*I vow to realize the supreme Buddha Way.*

All Buddhas and Bodhisattvas of the past, present, and future practiced the Bodhisattva conduct and attained Buddhahood by relying on these four great vows. But in order to make vows you must have faith. First, believe there is a Land of Ultimate Bliss; secondly, have faith in Amitabha Buddha; thirdly, believe that you and Amitabha Buddha have a great affinity, and that you can certainly be born in the Land of Ultimate Bliss. With faith in these three things, you may then make the vow, "I desire to be born in Amitabha's country." There is a saying,

*"I want to be born in the Western Pure Land."*

"I want to be born there. Nobody's forcing me to go; nobody's dragging me there. Although Amitabha Buddha has come to guide me, I'm going as a volunteer because I want to be close to him. I want to be born in the Land of Ultimate Bliss and to see Amitabha Buddha when my lotus flower opens. I want to meet the Buddha and hear the Dharma." These are the vows you need. Then you must practice. How? Recite the Buddha's name, saying "Namo Amitabha Buddha, Namo Amitabha Buddha..." as if you were trying to save your head from the executioner, running ahead to keep your head.

Faith, vows, and practice are the travel expenses for rebirth in the Land of Ultimate Bliss. They are your ticket.



## **The Song of Mindfulness of the Buddha, the Dharma, and the Sangha.**

As we recite "Namo Amitabha Buddha" we each create and adorn our own Land of Ultimate Bliss. We each accomplish our own Land of Ultimate Bliss which is certainly not hundreds of thousands of millions of Buddhalands from here. Now, the Land of Ultimate Bliss really is hundreds of thousands of millions of Buddhalands away; and yet it doesn't go beyond the very thought we are having right now. Since it is right in our hearts, we say it's not hundreds of thousands of millions of Buddhalands from here. The Land of Ultimate Bliss is the original true heart, the true mind, of every one of us. If you obtain this heart, you will be born in the Land of Ultimate Bliss. If you don't understand your own original true heart, you will not. Amitabha Buddha and living beings are not distinct--that's why I say the Land of Ultimate Bliss is not so far away. In one thought, turn the light within. Know that originally you are the Buddha, and your original Buddhahood is just the Land of Ultimate Bliss. For this reason, you should cast out your defiled thoughts, your lustful desires, your confusion, jealousy, contrariness, selfishness and plots for personal gain. Be like the Bodhisattvas who benefit everyone and enlighten all beings. Just that is the Land of Ultimate Bliss. Don't you agree that the absence of confusion and false thoughts is the Land of Ultimate Bliss? If it isn't, what is? Don't seek outside.

Good and Wise Advisors, you are all ones of great wisdom and great intelligence. You are all cleverer than I, and in the future you will explain the Dharma better than I do. But now, because you don't know Chinese, I am introducing you to this old-fashioned tradition. In the future you'll transform it and make it unspeakably wonderful.

Let me sing you a song:

*Amitufo, the Great Sage and Master,  
Serene, subtle, wonderful  
beyond all others...*

*Pools of seven gems,  
Flowers of four colors and  
waves of shimmering gold.*

It mentions the four shades of lotus blossoms. Who is the great sage and master? Amitabha Buddha is. *Amitufo, the Great Sage and Master, serene, subtle, wonderful beyond all others.* He is upright, adorned and very wonderful. There is no image as fine as that of Amitabha Buddha. Within the *Pools of seven gems are flowers of four colors.* Not only are the pools filled with seven jewels, the water forms *waves of shimmering gold.*



### **Wondrous Green, Yellow, Red, and White Lotus Flowers.**

The response from our reciting "Namo Amitabha Buddha" here where we are is that in the Land of Ultimate Bliss a lotus forms in the pools of the seven jewels, filled with the waters of eight meritorious virtues. The more we recite the bigger it grows, but it doesn't open. When we die, our intrinsic nature is born in that lotus in the Land of Ultimate Bliss. There are nine grades of lotuses, and how high a grade of lotus we are born in is determined by how much we recited the Buddha's name. Reciting more causes our lotus to grow bigger; fewer recitations result in a small lotus. "Well, suppose I don't recite at all?" If we stop reciting altogether, our lotus will wither and die. The grade of lotus depends on our own effort in reciting the Buddha's name.



### **The Blowing Wind and the Calm Waters Proclaim the Mahayana.**

The pure heart is like the moon in water. The mind in samadhi is like a cloudless sky. If you can recite so completely that you enter the Buddha-recitation samadhi, then hearing the wind, it's "Namo Amitabha Buddha," and hearing the rain, it's "Namo Amitabha Buddha." Every sound you hear recites the Buddha's name. *The water flows, the wind blows, proclaiming the Mahayana...* The Chinese poet Su Dongpo said: *Of the colors of the mountain, none is not the vast, long tongue. Of the sounds of the streams, all are the clear, pure sound.* All the mountain's colors are the Buddha's long tongue proclaiming the wonderful Dharma. This is the attainment of the Buddha-recitation samadhi. So I wrote this verse:

*If you recite the Buddha's name, reciting without cease,  
The mouth recites "Amitufo" and makes things of a piece.  
Scattered thoughts do not arise, samadhi you attain.*

*For rebirth in the Pure Land, your hope is not in vain.  
If all day you detest the suffering Saha's pain,  
Make rebirth in Ultimate Bliss your mind's essential aim.  
Cut off the red dust thoughts within your mind.  
Put down impure reflections, and pure thoughts you will find.*

Recite the Buddha's name from morning to night and your confused thoughts will not arise. You will naturally attain the Buddha-recitation samadhi and be reborn in the Land of Ultimate Bliss, according to your will. You know that the Saha world is full of pain and suffering; so cut off worldly pleasures and have no thoughts of sexual desire, craving, or struggling for fame and profit. Put down all worldly concerns and view them as false. Seek rebirth, ultimate bliss; this thought of rebirth is extremely important. This verse clearly explains the principles of reciting the Buddha's name, and if you carefully savor its flavor, you'll find it very helpful.



### **One Mind Unconfused Is Samadhi.**

Reciting the Buddha's name every day in a recitation session, we are planting the seeds of Buddhahood. Each recitation sows a seed; ten recitations sow ten seeds. If you recite a million times a day, you plant that many seeds, and one day they will sprout. Just recite; don't worry about having a scattered mind.

*When the water-clearing pearl is tossed in muddy water,  
the muddy water becomes clear.  
When the Buddha's name enters a confused mind,  
the confused mind attains to the Buddha.*

Reciting the Buddha's name is like throwing a pearl into muddy water so that the muddy water becomes clear. This clear-water pearl can purify even the filthiest water. Recitation of the Buddha's name is just like this pearl. Who can count the false thoughts which fill our minds and succeed one another endlessly like waves on the sea? When the Buddha's name enters a confused mind, the confused mind becomes the Buddha. Recite the name once and there is one Buddha in your mind; recite it ten times and there are ten Buddhas; recite it a hundred times and there are a hundred Buddhas. The more you recite, the more Buddhas there are. Say, "Namo Amitabha Buddha," and there's a Buddha-thought in your mind. When you

are mindful of the Buddha, the Buddha is mindful of you. It's like communication by radio. You recite here, and it's received there. There is that kind of response. When you recite the Buddha's name, you don't have any other false thoughts, so your inherent nature has inconceivable merit and virtue.



### **When All Thoughts Are Empty, One Enters the Lotus Land.**

Our restless mind is constantly looking for something to keep it busy. To set it at ease, we give it the task of reciting "Namo Amitabha Buddha." This is also a form of Dhyana meditation. You don't have to sit in lotus posture with your eyes closed, like Dhyana Master Linji, to investigate Dhyana. You can also meditate with your eyes open.

*Walking is Dhyana, sitting is Dhyana.  
In speech or silence, movement or stillness,  
One is always at peace.*

One can investigate Dhyana whether moving or still, awake or asleep. An ancient saying goes:

*With Dhyana and Pure Land, one is like a tiger with horns,  
A teacher of humans in this life, a Patriarch or Buddha in the next.  
With Dhyana but not Pure Land, nine out of ten go astray.  
With Pure Land but not Dhyana, ten thousand cultivate and ten thousand go.*

The Pure Land Dharma-door is the easiest method of practice. All the great Bodhisattvas have praised it. Manjushri Bodhisattva praises it, and Universal Worthy Bodhisattva, in the "Conduct and Vows of Universal Worthy" chapter of the *Flower Adornment Sutra*, exhorts all living beings to seek rebirth in the Pure Land. He himself recites the Buddha's name and seeks rebirth as well. Guanshiyin Bodhisattva is also mindful of the Buddha, and in the *Shurangama Sutra*, Great Strength Bodhisattva praises this Dharma-door of reciting the Buddha's name and describes how he obtained perfect penetration by means of it. Thus, all the great Bodhisattvas of the past have praised and cultivated the Pure Land Dharma-door. The patriarchs of the past all first investigated Dhyana, became enlightened, and then exclusively recited the Buddha's name. There were those who, every time they recited the Buddha's name, would have a transformation Buddha come out of their

mouths. Dhyana Master Yong Mingshou was that way. More recently, Elder Master Yinguang exclusively advocated mindfulness of the Buddha and Elder Master Hsu Yun also advocated reciting the Buddha's name. It is the easiest, most convenient, and most perfect Dharma-door, praised by all Buddhas of the ten directions. Doesn't the *Amitabha Sutra* describe how the Buddhas of the six directions each bring forth a vast and long tongue covering the three thousand great thousand worlds to praise this Dharma-door? This is the best practice, and everyone should take it up especially in the Dharma-ending Age. However, since we are upholding the Proper Dharma Age here, if you choose not to recite the Buddha's name, then you should investigate Dhyana (meditate) as if your lives depended on it! Don't fear suffering!



### **Suddenly Awakening to Non-production, One Sees the Buddha.**

In the Dharma-ending Age, recitation of the Buddha's name is a most important Dharma-door. Don't take it lightly. Every time Dhyana Master Yong Mingshou, the Sixth Patriarch of the Pure Land School, recited the Buddha's name, a transformation Buddha came out of his mouth. Those with the Five Eyes and Six Spiritual Penetrations could see it. When you recite the Buddha's name, you emit a light which frightens all weird creatures and strange ghosts away. They run far, far away and leave you alone. So the merit and virtue of holding the Buddha's name is inconceivable.



### **Attaining Wonderful Enlightenment Is Our Personal Responsibility.**

Don't see the Buddha-recitation as true, and don't regard it as false. If you practice skillfully, it becomes true. If you practice poorly, it turns into something false. All Dharma-doors are like this.

*When deviant people practice proper methods,  
Proper methods become deviant.  
When proper people practice deviant methods,  
Deviant methods turn proper.*

Proper and deviant depend on the person. When we bow to the Buddha, we should make this contemplation: "My body pervades limitless Buddha lands as I bow before each Buddha in each Buddha land." Contemplate your body as expanding to fill the entire Dharma Realm.

*If people wish to understand  
All Buddhas of the past, present, and future,  
They should contemplate the nature of the Dharma Realm:  
Everything is made from mind alone.*



### **May All Virtuous Ones Work Hard Together.**

Everyone can practice the Buddha-recitation Dharma-door. All you have to do is recite "Namo Amitabha Buddha," and at the end of your life you will be born in a lotus in the Land of Ultimate Bliss, where you will hear Amitabha Buddha speak Dharma and eventually attain Buddhahood. "Death is still far off," you say, "why should we recite the Buddha's name now?" You must develop your skill in reciting right now, so that you will remember to recite at the time of death. Just as a tree must grow for many years before it becomes a hundred feet tall, you must begin practicing reciting the Buddha's name now so that when it comes time to die, you will be able to recite single-mindedly, without sickness, greed, hatred, stupidity, or confusion, and Amitabha Buddha will come to guide you. If you don't recite now, you won't remember to when your body starts to fall apart at the time of death, unless a Good and Wise Advisor is there to remind you and help you. Therefore, it's important to recite the Buddha's name every day and enter the Buddha-recitation samadhi, so that reciting will come naturally at the time of death and you won't forget. Or if you are unable to recite Namo Amitabha Buddha, Amitabha Buddha won't forget you and so he will come riding the ship of his great vows, receive you onto a golden dais, and take you to the Land of Ultimate Bliss. He won't forget about you.

*You are mindful of the Buddha,  
I am mindful of the Buddha;  
Why are we mindful of the Buddha?  
To end birth and death, to transform the Saha,  
So that everywhere is ultimate bliss, everywhere Amitabha.*



*With no you and no me, what is there?  
In still contemplation, the myriad things are understood.  
Cut off afflictions, smash through ignorance;  
Leap out of the Triple Realm's great river of love.*

Foolish people recite the Buddha's name, hoping the Buddha will give them some good food to eat. Some recite, "Namo Amitabha Buddha, Namo Amitabha Buddha, please give us some warmer weather!" Other people recite hoping to obtain good luck and happiness, or to escape problems and suffering. The primary purpose of reciting the Buddha's name is to end birth and death, that is, to have control over our own births and deaths. If we want to live, we can recite Amitabha Buddha's name day after day and live forever. If we want to die, then we recite "Namo Amitabha Buddha" and the Buddha will come to receive us. We will be free of illness, greed, and delusion, as if entering samadhi, and we will be reborn in the Land of Ultimate Bliss with no problem at all. Secondly, if we recite the Buddha's name, we can transform the Saha world itself into the Land of Ultimate Bliss, where beings endure none of the sufferings and enjoy every happiness. Recite to the point that you, me, the Buddha, and everything else disappears. "That's too dangerous! If everything is gone, won't we all be finished?" you say. It's only to be feared that you won't be finished. If you are truly "finished," then you are free. At that time, you will understand the myriad phenomena of the world, such as why crows are black and cranes are white, why pines are straight and brambles are twisted. Since you understand everything, afflictions are cut off, ignorance is smashed, and you leap out of the great river of love that courses through the Desire, Form, and Formless Realms. In the Triple Realm, we are so deluded by love, loving each other until we die, and then coming back for another round, never waking up enough to escape. Now, however, we want to leap out of the river of love. "I don't want to," someone says. Then you can undergo a few more rounds of birth and death. With each round, you sink lower and lower, until you sink to the very bottom of the river of love! Drowning represents your soul being split into many small creatures, such as mosquitoes and ants. These insects have low intelligence, few blessings, and very short lives.



## **The Western Land of Ultimate Bliss Is Your Home.**

In this world, nothing is fixed before it happens. The future can always be changed. For example, before we recited "Namo Amitabha Buddha," we didn't have the qualifications to be reborn in the Land of Ultimate Bliss. Once we recite, we become qualified. Even if originally it would have been difficult for you to be reborn in the West, once you recite it becomes possible. On the other hand, even if you could be reborn in the West with a single recitation, if you don't recite once, you won't get there. So nothing is fixed. The *Vajra Sutra* says, "There are no fixed dharmas. This is called Anuttarasamyaksambodhi." That is the method for attaining unsurpassed, proper and equal, right enlightenment. We should advance courageously, undaunted by suffering, difficulty, cold, and hunger, until we arrive at the Land of Ultimate Bliss. Reciting "Namo Amitabha Buddha" is what really counts. In reciting, the most important thing is to end birth and death.



# Nan Huaijin on Buddha-Recitation in Chan Practice

*From 'GRASS MOUNTAIN - A SEVEN DAY INTENSIVE IN CH'AN TRAINING WITH  
MASTER NAN'*

Translated by Margaret Yuan and Janis Walker

## **Day 4, first period (6:35-7:05 am)**

Master: "To purify one's own mind; that is the whole teaching of Buddha." From the beginning stages of practice until you are complete is all just this. Your understanding must be true, and you must go by the main road. The minds of living beings are full of curiosity. People don't know that the ordinary is Tao. Those who study Buddhism must have a third eye - Wisdom - in their heads. The ordinary mind is Tao (The Way), and speaking of genuine Tao, it is very difficult to master the mind. If you search for Tao outside the mind, that is heresy.

In Buddhist practice, discipline is very important.

Discipline is not for regulating other people, but is the scale that regulates our own body and mind. If you live by discipline, Samadhi (meditative concentration) develops. If you develop Samadhi, wisdom develops.

We must act for several decades just as we do in any one day - just as we do during these seven days when we check ourselves on every detail of our own body, speech and thought. Don't indulge them. A demon and a Buddha possess the same superphysical powers, but the difference is in their minds. Those who practice the Mahayana Bodhisattva Way must first eliminate pride from their minds.

If you don't want to work hard, but just expect the Master to give you some secret method, you will never achieve anything.



If discipline, Samadhi and wisdom are insufficient, it is because of ignorance. Pride develops from knowledge – and when your understanding is not clear, this is ignorance. If you are full of book knowledge, but you cannot apply it to your actions, this is also ignorance. When wrong desire, resentment, ignorance, pride and suspicion all disappear, you become compassionate and serene.

The ordinary mind is Tao! In the Chan Hall you must regulate your body and mind. Don't indulge yourself. Don't be disorganized. Remember: "To purify one's

own mind; that is the whole teaching of Buddha." All of the curious, strange and abstruse things are merely techniques, skills and magic. They are half of the road, not the way home.

Enlighten yourself, then enlighten others - then your enlightenment and behavior are both perfect. People's minds are all different, just like their faces, therefore we need so many methods to guide you to Buddhahood. In the *Lotus Sutra*, it says, "If you want to get somebody into Buddhism, first hook him with a desire." This is also like the Confucian saying: "knowing the skill to tempt people to do good."

The Confucian teaching of retrospection is the same as the Buddhist teaching of purifying one's own mind. The *Great Learning* says this is "being watchful over oneself when alone." Of the six paramitas (perfections) of the Mahayana, the first three are charity, discipline and patience: in other words, regulating your behavior. Purifying the mind is inward charity. Discipline consists of form and nature. The *form* of discipline is outward behavior. The *nature* of discipline is when the mind is stopped - so of course there is no desire for evildoing. Patience also consists of inner and outer aspects. It can be divided into outer patience- behavior-and inner patience-no intention of patience (that is, no mind).



While you are meditating, you can calm down, but after you leave your seat you can't. Real dhyana (meditative absorption) exists all the time and everywhere. If you can be in dhyana anytime and anywhere, then wisdom can be developed. In practicing we must cultivate along a parallel track of good fortune and wisdom. Prajna is wisdom and charity is practicing good fortune. If we can purify our mind anytime and everywhere, that is great Dhyana.

After Chan Master Yung Ming Shou was enlightened, he still recited Buddha's name-this is a good example of the double track of Chan and Pure Land in practice.

During meditation, recite Buddha's name. Chant it slowly.

Empty the mind between one recitation and the following one until your idle thoughts arise, then again recite "Namo Amitufo." Empty the mind for as long as you can. This is called the double track of Chan and Pure Land cultivation. It is

also known as the double track of the void and manifestation. This is an extremely outstanding method, but its Tao is very ordinary. Don't underestimate it.

The yoga method is silent recitation, but chanting aloud can prolong life. Amitufo means infinite light, infinite life. If you recite properly there will naturally be light. Breathing will naturally slow down and Chi should be adjusted very softly and regularly. What you chant is Amitufo, but the empty part is the Amitufo of self-nature.



## Master Xuyun (Empty Cloud) Teaches Recitation

*FROM 'EMPTY CLOUD - THE TEACHINGS OF XU YUN'*

Compiled from the notes and recollections of Master Jy Din Shakya and related to  
Ming Zhen Shakya

### **Meditation on the Buddha's Name**

In Mahayana Buddhism, the Buddha Amitabha, the Buddha of the West, is very important. Chinese people pronounce Amitabha Amitufo. And so, repeating the name Amitufo is an excellent practice.

First, we keep in our mind an image of the Buddha Amitabha. We also acknowledge our great debt to him. Did not the Bodhisattva Avalokitesvara-Guan Yin spring from his brow? Where would Mahayana salvation be without our beloved Guan Yin? So we keep the Buddha in our mind as we repeat his sacred name.

What is the wrong way to repeat the Buddha's name? That's easy to describe. Think of a sick person who is given a bottle of penicillin pills. Think of him sitting there holding the unopened bottle repeating "penicillin, penicillin, penicillin". Will that cure him? No. He must take the penicillin into himself. He must swallow and assimilate it. Merely repeating the name of the medicine will not cure him.



# Introduction to Nianfo Chan/Nembutsu Zen and the Traceless Mind

By Fashi YaoXin Shakya

Nianfo Chan/Nembutsu Zen is the practice most commonly taught in China to enter the gateless gate of Zen. It consist “simply” in the recitation of a sacred or symbolic name, such as the name of a Buddha or a mantra. Such a practice could be seen as a popular form of devotion for simple and helpless people in need for refuge.

Don't be such a fool because the practice of recitation is a wonderful Dharma raft. It fits all situations, all spiritual inclinations, and all kinds of people from lowest to highest in the spiritual Oneness. It is also a blessing that fits the Linji/Rinzai mindset of always giving mind what it needs as MingZhen Shakya, my late Dharma Teacher, used to paraphrase.

It is a universal practice known in all kinds of schools in Mahayana Buddhism but also in Theravada Buddhism.

The roots of the practice are Buddhānusmṛiti, recollection of the Buddha. Keeping the Buddha in mind, at heart. It is as simple and beautiful as that.

Now, we could argue that there are different kinds of mindsets or intentions one can have when doing the practice. We have to harmonize our first intention to what the mind needs.

If I'm standing in the middle of a crowded train filled with noisy and smelly people or in any boring situation, to just attain some form of peaceful calm is already a wonderful thing to do... instead of cultivating the worries of daily life again and again, the advertisements and all the other futilities. And there are many more levels or kinds of ways to cultivate the practice of recitation on different occasions.

We use an old Chinese booklet called “48 doors to Nianfo”, also called » Taming the Monkey Mind » in the most famous translation, to teach about the subtleties of this practice. As I said earlier, this practice is a raft so this small booklet also allows its reader to enter into the realm of the practice of Huatou, or at least get a glimpse of its ways.

Now, on a more spiritual level you have to understand one thing. When you get serious about any practice, you realise that there is no fundamental difference between these practices, they lead to one another naturally. Recitation, Huatou/Wato, ZuoChan/ZaZen, Sewing the Kesa, Bowing, Giving Incense, Cleaning Toilets, Cutting Carrots, ... in all these practice, only Pure Mind! Amitabha Mind! A Natural Mind of Light and Compassion.

The same principle is true for the four main practices we share in our Sangha. To sum it up these are: 1. *Recitation*, 2. *Huatou/Wato*, 3. *GuanYin Chan/Kannon Zen*, 4. *MoChao Chan/Mokusho Zen*.

Now, back to the practice of recitation, our main topic. In whatever form or tradition, the practice of recitation is highly praised by the Great Masters of the past, such as master Hanshan, partly because it can be used in any situation, at any stage on the path, at any time, any age, any social status... it can be applied to whatever state of mind the practitioner is experimenting.

Our usual set of mind is a « mind of delusion», always trapped in a view or another, a craving or another. It is like a man dwelling in a constant fog, turning around a mountain without ever seeing there is a mountain in the first place, let alone a path leading up the mountain.

When one sees there is a path up the mountain, that there is a possibility out of our suffering, he begins to climb that path, it's the difficult path of concentration.

When our minds are in that state we call it « Mind of Concentration », a mind that is fixed on one selfless goal.

Then one gets finally to the top of what is seen as the Spiritual Everest of most traditions. In our Zen Linji/Rinzai school, we call this Kensho or JianXin, seeing mind. What all Zen ancestors urged for. In other traditions it is paradise, knowing God, entering the bride's room, meeting sky father, it is Oneness, death of the self and the brilliant presence of a truer Self. A Buddha Nature of non-difference, emptiness made form or form made emptiness.

That quality of our Buddha Nature is symbolically linked in our Chinese tradition to Amitufo, literally meaning the Buddha of Pure Light beyond Space and Time. One such experience can fill a devotee for years and years of pious practice and is generally the goal of most spiritual paths. We call it "Unified/Union Mind" or a Mind in Samadhi/Zen



But the specificity of Zen/Chan is to see these experiences as beautiful and possibly very inspiring in our life, but not at all as the end of the path.

To the contrary it is the very beginning of the path! Every practice towards Samadhi's Egoless state before Kensho isn't what is traditionally called Zen.

What we begin to see here is that every Buddhist practice, and most certainly recitation, can be used as a Door to Samadhi Mind, a door to Zen, our most natural state.

As I said, we acknowledge these experiences but we soon understand that the heart of our experience isn't to dwell in Samadhi, apart from society in a dreamlike or heaven like experience. It's a trap easy to fall in, the path of the Buddhahood for ourselves. Shakyamuni himself doubt about his capacities at first, before Brahma begged him to teach his method to the world.

So, the specificity of Zen is to be a Traceless Path. The fourth Mind is the traceless mind or No mind, Wu/Mu Xin. Big word you might say, but what does it mean? It means a path of traceless manifestation of our true self. Isn't that clearer? Look at it this way.

Once we understood that cultivating Union/Samadhi/Kensho per se isn't the path. In Zen, we say the true path is going from the top of the mountain to the market place. We let the sacred be manifested and we let ourselves be manifested by him in our daily lives. If there is Kensho wonderful, if it's a day of no Kensho wonderful too. Our way is *Farming Chan/Zen* as Fo Yuan Shakya, our grandfather in the Yunmen/Ummon lineage used to say. And in our Order of lay Zen Priests, we practice a Zen of householders, a Zen of house cleaning and bath to the kids, just as much as a Zen of liturgy, zuochan/zazen or Kasaya sewing. Every action can be a field where we manifest the path.

So we might try to deliberately manifest through our acts the Union Mind/Kensho we experimented at some point in our life, especially through the practice of the Three Pure Precepts: Do Good, Don't do Bad and Keep a Harmonious Mind. That is called a mind of manifestation with traces, traces of our little self, wanting to do good. It's not a bad thing per se of course!

Then we can say that when we harmoniously and naturally act according to the 3 Pure Precepts, that then is called Traceless manifestation! Is that clearer? All this is a grounded expression of the Four Noble Truths and the Eightfold Path.

Which we summarize as Right View-Right Action, no need for endless talks on the nature of karma and rebirth, MingZhen my Old Sun hated spending time on nonsense talk like that.

Zen is Action, Action is Karma! Wake Up!

Now back to Nianfo, at the very heart of it, the idea is to resonate from the same heart than the name we are chanting. To fully let go and let Buddha, Guanyin, Amitufo, Wu, Jesus, God, universe, whatever chosen recitation we need, to Fully Recite and to Fully Listen in the silent recitation of our Heart.

Out-loud Recitation is good too but is rather a Chi circulation practice on the subtle level, and also helps to integrate whatever happens when practicing Walking Recitation in the woods or mountains for example - but that is a whole other topic.

Anyway, it is as simple as that. It is the core of the 48 methods to Nianfo booklet and at the core of Chan practice since almost the teachings of Ming Dynasty master Hanshan. It is the 'Union of Mahasthamaprapta' simple practice of recitation, which allows everyone, every place and anytime to practice, with the subtle method of Inner Listening advocated by GuanYin/Kannon which is at the Origin of Huatou Chan/Wato Zen tradition and was praised by Manjushri and the Buddha in the Shurangama Sutra.

It is the Heart of mantra recitation, Indian japa, and many other Christian or Muslim practices of Recitation. To fully listen and fully say the words with all our attention, until the one being attentive gives way to the Divine Name in us, around us and through us.

The practice of asking '*Who is the one reciting?*' Known as Huatou Chan/Wato Zen, can only be established when a firm concentration is established.

Only then can we practice Huatou, experience Kensho/JianXin/Seeing Mind, forget who and what was experienced and let ourselves be manifested in whichever action.

Of course, as Sixth Patriarch Huineng advised us in his Platform Sutra, and Chihi the founder of the Tientai School before him, there is no sense in total separation between a gradual path and a sudden path. Yet, there are gradual and sudden phenomena in our Zen life!

So practice the simplest practice of recitation of a sacred name. Stick to it and you surely will enter Zen, Kensho, Oneness Samadhi... and then back to cutting your carrots!

Amitufo!  
Amitufo!  
Amitufo!

