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<i>Student Name:</i> Ruxin Zhang (張如心)	
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A Study on How to Implement the Ten Vows of Samantabhadra Bodhisattva in the Infinite Life Sutra

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Good morning, Respected provost and my dear classmates. My name is Ruxin Zhang and the topic I would like to share with you today is a study on how to implement the *ten vows of Samantabhadra Bodhisattva* 普賢十願 in *the Infinite Life Sutra* 無量壽經.

The presentation will be divided into three parts. The first part is ‘Motivation’, the second part is ‘Analysis’. And finally, I will share with you ‘Practical Application 愛普雷’.

Motivation

Let’s start with the first part.

Today I want to share with you is the *ten vows of Samantabhadra Bodhisattva*, the reason why I choose to introduce it is not only because Buddha said in *the Flower Avatamsaka Sutra* 華嚴經 that if we do not cultivate the *Samantabhadra Bodhisattva’s virtue* 普賢行, we cannot become perfect in the supreme Buddhahood. And the title of the second chapter of *the Infinite Life Sutra* is ‘The Virtues of Samantabhadra Bodhisattva were Followed by All Beings 德遵普賢第二’, it is said that the sixteen Bodhisattvas including *Worthy and Protective Bodhisattva* 賢護菩薩 and the great Bodhisattvas who attend this *Dharma Teaching* 法會 all cultivate based on the *ten vows of Samantabhadra Bodhisattva*, with the ultimate destination of going to the Western Pure Land, in order to achieve the supreme Buddhahood. So if we want to uncover our own true nature and become Buddha throughout our lives, we

must attach importance and implement to the *ten vows of Samantabhadra Bodhisattva*.

Analysis

Now let's move on to the second part.

First of all, we need to understand the *ten vows of Samantabhadra Bodhisattva*, in the Chapter on the Vows and practices of Samantabhadra Bodhisattva 普賢行願品, the Buddha explains to us that there are ten guidelines for the great vows and practices by *Samantabhadra Bodhisattva* 普賢菩薩. The first great vow of *Samantabhadra Bodhisattva* is to 'Pay respect to all Buddhas. 禮敬諸佛'. And the respect here not only means that when we see all Buddha statues, we need to respect and worship them. In this case, our mind-measure is too narrow. The Buddhas here refer to the Buddhas of the past, present, and future. And the future Buddha is all sentient beings, even the wicked in the world or those in hell, they also have the *Buddha nature* 佛性, and they will also become Buddhas in the future, and we all need to respect them. Not only that, all non-sentient beings have the *Dharma nature* 法性. The *Buddha nature* and *Dharma nature* are the same nature, as stated in *the Flower Avatamsaka Sutra*, 'Sentient and non-sentient beings all can become Buddhas 情與無情，同圓種智'. Therefore, we must respect everything. For example, for tables and chairs, we wipe them clean and place them neatly, which is respect for them, and this is respect for the items. And when we encounter something that needs to be done, we put all our mind and effort into completing it, which is the respect for the things.

The second vow is to 'Praise Tathagata 稱讚如來', it is worth noting that the 'Tathagata' here is different from the 'All Buddhas'. The latter has an undifferentiated and equal respect for all sentient and non-sentient beings, but the Tathagata is our true nature. Things that correspond with one's true nature can be praised, those that do not correspond with one's true nature are to be respected, but not praised. For instance, in

the Forty-fascicle Flower Adornment Sutra 四十華嚴, a good example is the Sudhana visited fifty-three kalyana-mitra and learned from them 善財童子五十三參, every time the Sudhana visited a kalyana-mitra, he always respects them first and then praises them. However, for the three kalyana-mitra who are representatives of greed, anger, and ignorance, the Sudhana only respects them but does not praise them. From this, it can be seen that respect is all equal, but praising others requires true wisdom, and the ability to distinguish right from wrong, good from evil. We should praise the good and proper deeds, and not praise the deviated deeds.

The third vow is to ‘Make offerings extensively 廣修供養’, the *Samantabhadra Bodhisattva* treats all beings with the mind of ‘offering’ rather than ‘giving’. The difference between these two kinds of mind is that offering is a form of contribution with respect, but giving is not necessarily done with respect. Because all beings can attain Buddhahood, the *Samantabhadra Bodhisattva* is using the mind of worshipping Buddhas to equally and respectfully offer all sentient and non-sentient beings.

The fourth vow is to ‘Repent of karmic obstacles 懺悔業障’, the previous three vows all emphasize that we should focus on cultivating good fortune and virtue, which is important, but Buddhism emphasizes the dual cultivation of good fortune and wisdom. If we only have good fortune but lack wisdom, then we can easily create three karmas of behavior, speech, and mind. And regardless of whether we create good or evil karma, they will hinder the immeasurable wisdom, virtue, and talent within our self-nature, and we are still mired in reincarnation. Therefore, we need to repent our karma, and repentance is not always about regretting what we have done in the past, but about not making the same mistakes again, which is the true meaning of repentance.

The fifth vow is to ‘Rejoice at other’s meritorious deeds 隨喜功德’, all sentient beings have developed the karmic impressions of jealousy and arrogance since the immeasurable eons. Whenever we see some benefits and progress from others, our

jealousy easily arises, and we even try our best to create obstacles for others. And this vow is specifically aimed at this issue, when others accumulate merits, we should be happy and do our best to help them, even if we really do not have the ability to help them, we can praise them. It is really incredible that through this way, we can achieve the same merits as them.

The sixth vow is to ‘Request the turning of the Dharma-cakra 請轉法輪’. In Buddhism, the Dharma-cakra is used to represent the teaching of Buddhist scriptures, because the meaning of cakra is that existence and emptiness, movement and stillness are not different things 空有不二、動靜不二, and can represent the truth of life and the universe. Therefore, the meaning of ‘Turning of the Dharma-cakra’ is to promote Dharma education and introduce the Dharma to the broad masses. As we all know that Buddhism is honoring teachers and revering their teachings, and there is no exception to this point in ancient and modern times. So we should salute and invite kalyana-mitra with utmost sincerity and respect. As Master Yinguang 印光大師 once said, ‘If we have a little sincerity, we can only receive a little benefit, and if we have complete sincerity, we can receive complete benefit. 一分誠敬得一分利益, 十分誠敬得十分利益’. But for ourselves, when we have achieved some achievements and insights in our cultivation, we should arouse the intention to help others, so should we also wait for others to invite us? Buddha reminds us in *the Infinite Life Sutra* that ‘Bodhisattvas should be friends with all beings, even if they have not invited Bodhisattvas to help them 為諸庶類作不請之友’. We should not wait for others to invite us, we should do our best to introduce the Buddha’s teachings to the public at appropriate times and occasions, and propagate the Buddha’s education to benefit all beings.

The seventh vow is to ‘Request the Buddha to reside in this world 請佛住世’, in our current era, almost no one has only listened to Buddhist scriptures once, and they can attain awakening and enlightenment. Therefore, the vast majority of people need to continuously learn the teachings of the Buddha for a long time, which requires them

to be invite kalyana-mitra to teach the scriptures in the same place for a long time. But how to invite them requires us to truly follow and practice the teachings of kalyana-mitra, so that we can keep them teaching here. This is because all Buddhas, Bodhisattvas, and kalyana-mitra lived in this world with only one thing, which was to educate all sentient beings. So, if we accept their teachings on the surface but do not actually do what they teach, then we cannot let them remain with us.

These first seven vows are all kinds of vows of cultivation, while the last three vows belong to the dedicated merits. The eighth vow is to ‘Constantly be a diligent follower of the Buddha’s teaching 常隨佛學’, which is to dedicate merits to Bodhi. We need to have good examples when learning any subject, and learning Buddhism is no exception. The *Infinite Life Sutra* is the Buddha’s guideline for our thought, speech, and behavior, and if we can cultivate according to this sutra, so that our thought, speech, and behavior are exactly the same as this sutra. It is to learn Amitabha Buddha, and this is to constantly follow the Buddha’s teachings.

The ninth vow is to ‘Accord with all sentient beings 恆順眾生.’, this vow is to dedicate merits to all sentient beings. The character *heng* 恆 means constancy, and the character *shun* 順 means equal according to all sentient beings. However, it is worth noting that the character *shun* here needs to be intelligent and rational, and we need to follow the true nature of all beings, rather than following their troubles and evil karma.

The tenth vow is to ‘Dedicate all merits 普皆迴向.’, which summarizes all the merits and virtues accumulated in the previous nine vows and dedicates merits to the true nature. The dedicated merits of the eighth vow and ninth vow are in terms of appearance, and this vow is in terms of essence, indicating the non-duality of phenomena and essence, in order to achieve the ultimate fulfillment.

Practical Application

Let's now move on to the last part.

So, how can *the ten vows of Samantabhadra Bodhisattva* be implemented in our lives?

Firstly, we need to know what are the characteristics of the practice of Samantabhadra Bodhisattva? The characteristic is that the mind of Samantabhadra Bodhisattva is particularly broad. Bodhisattva's every thought is for all sentient beings in the universe and beyond, and affirms that the universe and beyond and oneself are one. The Bodhisattva's mind is inherent in our true nature, which can definitely be restored. Specifically, in daily life, we should interact with people handle matters and affairs with sincerity and respect, and cultivate the mind of purity, impartiality, and proper understanding. If we want to expand our minds, we must recite and uphold the Mahayana Sutras, especially *the Infinite Life Sutra*. This sutra can let us generate the Bodhi mind, and focus on chanting Buddha's name. If we have the same mind, virtue, and vows as Amitabha Buddha, we will naturally be able to correspond with *the ten vows of Samantabhadra Bodhisattva*.

Secondly, we need to clarify that the foundation of *the ten vows of Samantabhadra Bodhisattva* is the three conditions, six principles of harmony, threefold learnings, and six perfections. Without these foundations, we cannot achieve *the ten vows of Samantabhadra Bodhisattva*. Because the three conditions are the proper causes of attaining Buddhahood for Buddhas of the past, present, and future, they all started from cultivating the three conditions and eventually became Buddhas. The first condition is 'Be filial and provide and care for parents, and be respectful to and serve teachers, and be compassionate and do not kill, and cultivate the Ten Virtuous Karmas.', which is actually the implementation of the three roots of Confucianism, Buddhism, and Taoism. Filial piety and respect for teachers are implemented in *the Dizigui* 弟子規, and being compassionate and not killing is implemented in *the Treatise on Response and Retribution* 太上感應篇, only on these two foundations can we cultivate the Ten Virtuous Karmas. And the six principles of harmony are also

basic precepts and the foundation of cultivation. When we have these cultivation foundations, then we can begin to learn Buddhism. So where do we start learning Buddhism? We need to start with the threefold learnings of precepts, meditative concentration, and wisdom, and then we elevate to the six perfections, and finally is the practice of Samantabhadra Bodhisattva, which is the consummation of cultivation.

In summary, from *the Infinite Life Sutra*, we know that if we want to attain rebirth in *the Western Pure Land* 西方極樂世界 and remain in the state of non-retrogression, we must follow and practice the *ten vows of Samantabhadra Bodhisattva*. And in order to implement the *Practice of Samantabhadra Bodhisattva*, we must have a foundation of filial piety for parents and respect for teachers. Only when these foundations are firmly established can we solidly implement the *ten vows of Samantabhadra Bodhisattva*. Of course, the most crucial thing is to broaden our mind, we should use a purity, impartiality, and proper understanding mind to live, work, study and interact with others and circumstances. And we should not leave the Buddha's name with every thought, we are wholeheartedly determined to go to *the Western Pure Land*, and we will become perfect in the supreme Buddha-law.

This is my presentation, if there is any mistake in the content, any suggestions and advice would be appreciated, thank you very much.