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The Core of the Practice Method Taught by the *Infinite Life Sutra*

Respected Provost, and everyone present, good morning. I'm Wen Yuan Guan, the topic of my presentation is, 'The Core of the Practice Method Taught by the *Infinite Life Sutra*'.

My presentation will be divided into five parts. Firstly, I will introduce what is the core of the practice method taught by the *Infinite Life Sutra*, and why it is the core of this sutra. Secondly, I will explain in detail what this method means and why it is so important. Thirdly, I will state how to put the method into practice. Fourthly, I will give some supplementary explanations. And finally, I will draw a conclusion.

According to Upasaka Huang Nien Tsu, '**Bring forth the bodhi mind, and diligently recite the name of Amitabha Buddha with concentration**' is the core of the practice method of the *Infinite Life Sutra*. This viewpoint is also shared by Venerable Master Chin Kung.

Why is that? First, let us look at where this statement comes from. The Infinite Life Sutra was divided into forty-eight chapters by Upasaka Xia Lian Ju. Which chapter is number one? The chapter with the forty-eight vows. The forty-eight vows were spoken by Amitabha Buddha himself and are the most important part of the entire sutra. Of the forty-eight vows, the eminent monks said that the eighteenth vow is number one. Why did they say so? The eighteenth vow says that through mindful chanting of 'Amituofo' ten times at the end of one's life one can attain rebirth in the Western Pure Land.

And this is where the 'diligently recite the name of Amitabha Buddha with concentration' comes from.

The former part of the practice method, which is 'Bring forth the bodhi mind', comes from the nineteenth vow.

Furthermore, for the three grade of aspirants/ 'æ.s.pɪ.r ə nt / who can get reborn in the Pure land, the reason of their rebirth is that they practice this method-- 'Bring forth the bodhi mind, and diligently recite the name of Amitabha Buddha with concentration.'

Therefore, we can understand that this practice method is the outline and

core of the Infinite Life Sutra.

Next, I will explain in detail what this method means and how to put it into practice.

Before we can bring forth the bodhi mind, we must know what bodhi mind is.

‘Bodhi’ is Sanskrit, meaning ‘enlightenment’. ‘Bringing forth the bodhi mind’ means bringing forth the mind to attain enlightenment and be free of confusion and delusion.

Great Master Ou-I stated that vowing to be born into the Western Pure Land is the supreme Bodhi mind.

This is because the pursuit of rebirth in the Western Pure Land is the fastest way to attain Buddhahood, and so that we can help all sentient beings.

In a word, Bodhi mind is the great compassionate and sincere mind, with every thought to attain complete enlightenment for self and other.

Then how could we bring forth this bodhi mind?

It is said in the infinite life sutra that,

People in the world strive for things of little urgency. Amidst / ə'mɪd / extreme evils and severe sufferings, they diligently work ... dictated by their minds....Whether they have or do not have, they worry.

When they are rich and powerful, they become complacent and enjoy themselves at will. As they are impatient and apathetic/ ,æp.ə'θet.ɪk / towards the task of accumulating merits, their pomp and power are short lived.

The law of karma operates like a net stretched everywhere; in its meshes, it inevitably catches all offenders. The net woven of large and small ropes covers the whole world, from top to bottom and those caught in it feel utterly helpless and tremble in fear. This net has been in existence from of old. How painful and heart-rending!

The retributions of karma continue after death. The souls of the malicious inevitably fall into the evil realms/realm/ of suffering. Perhaps some will be reborn as hell beings, wild beasts, pests, maggots/ 'mæg.ət /, or emaciated / i'meɪ.si.eɪ.tɪd / ghosts. Those who commit evil will suffer

misfortune in this life and the hells in the next. Once you fall into the evil realms, you will cycle there for endless kalpas. You cannot hope to leave until your evil karmas are rectified. Such pain and misery are indescribable.

You must seek Bodhi and forever uproot the three poisons which drive the Samsara. By doing so, you will be forever free from the pains of the three evil realms.

If we do not want to be reborn in the evil realms, we must be determined to attain rebirth in the Western Pure Land in this lifetime. Thus, the true bodhi mind is awakened.

Now let's turn and learn to diligently recite the name of Amitabha Buddha with concentration.

The first question that needs to be addressed is why do we need to focus on just one thing?

Ancient accomplished practitioners said that mastering one is more important than studying many. It is also said, **'When one masters one sutra, one naturally masters all sutras.'**

Historically, many of those who delved /delv/ deeply into one method achieved in their learning and practice. Of those who learned many methods, very few succeeded in their cultivation. Those who learned a variety of methods and succeeded were exceptionally talented. People who have a medium or low capacity do not have the ability to learn many methods and succeed.

Therefore, we should delve deeply into one method.

If one **'ceaselessly makes focused and diligent progress, one will surely attain Buddhahood. There is no wish that one cannot fulfil.'**

If we understand the principles and methods, we will be able to fulfil any wish. Be it academics, one's work, or a Buddhist practitioner's cultivation, applying this principle and method will lead to complete success.

Then, why does it have to be the Buddha-name chanting method?

There are many sutras. **From the aspect of principle, all methods are equal.** And there is no one method superior or inferior to another. **But from the aspect of phenomena, every person's capacity, intelligence, and living environment differ.** They find some methods easier to learn

and practice, and others harder. Hence, the question of easiness or difficulty does not lie in the methods. It lies in a person's capacity and living environment.

The Buddha-name chanting method is **suitable for everyone to learn and practice regardless of one's capacity**. Other methods such as Zen meditation and Tibetan Buddhism are not as easy for one to learn and practice.

The Buddha-name chanting method is **simple and convenient**. It does not matter whether one has a Buddha image at home or if one has flowers to offer. Everyone can learn and practice. This method does not emphasize appearances or learning environment. It is the most convenient method.

The Buddha said: '**All dharmas are created by the mind.**' Thoughts will truly generate inconceivable energy-this is continual mindfulness.

When one understands this principle, one sees that those who are mindful of Buddha will attain Buddhahood.

And also, **All the Buddhas of the past, present and future are mindful of Amitabha. Likewise, Buddha Amitabha is mindful of them.**

A practitioner who chants the Buddha-name will attain rebirth in the Western Pure Land. When we mindfully chants 'Amituofo' and is mindful of the Western Pure Land, being diligently mindful without any interruption, then Amitabha Buddha will definitely come to us.

Chanting the Buddha's name wholeheartedly can diminish and eliminate / i'lim.i.neit / our accumulated karmic transgressions, and uncover our wisdom by ending greed, anger, ignorance, and delusion. This enables our inner brightness to shine through.

Now that we understand the reasons for choosing the method of chanting the Buddha's name and its merits, we then need to know how to put it into practice.

How to chant the Buddha's name? **Silently or aloud? Four syllables (Amitabha) or six (Namo Amitabha)?** The Pure Land method is the simplest and easiest without fixed forms. It is up to the practitioners to decide what is most suitable for them.

Chanting the Buddha's name aloud helps to suppress afflictions. When we chant aloud, we can chase away wandering thoughts and drowsiness / 'drau.zi.nəs / thus concentrating our mind. When we are alert, we can chant silently but continuously. We need to know which is most fitting.

There is no fixed form in chanting the Buddha's name, but there is a basic **principle, to let our mind become quiet, peaceful and without wandering thoughts.**

We can do walking meditation while chanting. When we feel tired, we can sit and continue chanting. If we feel stiff when sitting, we may get up to walk or prostrate. In this way, we can adjust our body accordingly. The more we chant and are mindful of Buddha Amitabha, the less our wandering thoughts will arise and the purer our mind will become, and the more wisdom we will attain. If not so, then something is incorrect in our way of practice. Therefore, we need to know how to harmonize our body and mind to keep our mind peaceful and quiet, and our body active and healthy.

I would like to introduce a method advocated by Venerable Master Chin kung.

It is The Ten Recitation Method.

The Ten-Recitation method is a simple, convenient, effective way to practice Buddha Name Recitation. It is especially suitable for those who find little time in the day for cultivation. Practicing this method helps us to regain mindfulness of Buddha Amitabha and brings us peace and clarity in the present moment.

The practice begins first thing in the morning when we wake up. We sit up straight and clearly recite Amitabha ten times with an undisturbed mind, aloud or silently to ourselves. We repeat this process eight more times for the rest of the day. Altogether, we do one round often recitations, nine times a day, every day as follows.

1. Upon waking up
2. Before starting breakfast
3. After finishing breakfast
4. Before work
5. Before starting lunch
6. After finishing lunch
7. Before starting dinner
8. After finishing dinner
9. At bedtime

Altogether, this method is practiced nine times daily. **The key is regularity**; disruption of this practice will reduce its effectiveness. Without interruption, the cultivator will soon feel an increase in one's

purity of mind and wisdom.

Diligent practice of the Ten-Recitation Method, together with unwavering belief and vows, can ensure fulfilment of our wish to reach the Western Pure Land.

We can also diligently learn and practice using the method of **‘the perfect control of the six senses with continuous pure thoughts’** taught by Mahasthamaprapta Bodhisattva. This is courageously / kə'reɪ.dʒəs.li / making focused and diligent progress.

In practicing, one follows the principle of **‘no doubt, no intermingling and no interruption’**. It takes great patience to transcend /træn'send/ the cycle of life and death. For all its simplicity and ease, the Buddha Name Chanting Method calls for patience in maintaining continuity / ,kɒn.tɪ'nju:.ə.ti /, without doubt or intermingling.

The **title** of The Buddha Speaks the Mahayana, Infinite Life, Adornment, Purity, Impartiality /ɪmˌpɑː.ʃi'æl.ə.ti/, and Enlightenment Sutra, clearly explains that one chants the Buddha's name with a pure, non-discriminating and awakened mind. On the other hand, the chanting enhances this state of mind, which in turn enhances further the chanting. Though it may be hard at first, the result is attaining a certain degree of purity of mind, which brings out the true self and true happiness, giving one the utmost enjoyment in life.

The Buddha-name chanting method mentioned above is the core practice of Pure Land Buddhism. The following are some supplementary explanations.

The perfect Dharma is founded on, being a good human being. If one is not a good person, how can one become a Buddha? The Visualization Sutra teaches the Three Conditions. The first condition includes being filial / 'fɪl.i.əl / to and caring for parents, being respectful to and serving teachers, being compassionate and not killing any living beings, and cultivating the Ten Virtuous Karmas. This first condition is the basis for being a good person. On this basis, if we diligently chant Buddha Amitabha's name, we will attain rebirth in the Western Pure Land.

People often say, **‘We bring nothing with us at birth and we take nothing with us at death.’** Everything in this world is illusory. We need to be truly awakened! Only mindfully chanting the Buddha-name and

seeking rebirth in the Western Pure Land, where our life span will be as infinite as that of Amitabha Buddha, is real. Without life, everything is futile. This is true wisdom. Nothing is truer than this!

However hard a life of diligent cultivation may be, it can only be for a short while. Afterwards, you will be reborn in the Land of Ultimate Bliss and enjoy perpetual joy there. Birth and death can never trouble you again as you are permanently free from the afflictions of the three poisons. With infinite life, you can effortlessly attain Unsurpassed /
,ʌn.sə'pɑ:st / Bodhi.

I sincerely hope that we can all attain rebirth in the Western Pure Land in this lifetime.

That's all for my presentation today, thank you for listening.