



A STUDY OF THE SPIRIT OF PURE LAND BUDDHISM IN CONTEMPORARY

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INTRODUCTION

Today's modern society is advancing as swiftly as a hurricane, artificial intelligence and advanced digital information technologies are remarkable, and at the same time, people have accomplished a great deal of success and benefit but also a great deal of harm in their lives. People have continued to indulge in their worldly desires for all time, committing sin after sin and bearing the weight of terrible deeds because they lack the knowledge or the willpower to change these patterns of gluttony and greed. How can they hope to realize the actual essence of Buddhahood if they cannot conquer and subdue worldly passions? Buddhism has permanently attached much importance to everyday life, as experienced by human beings. However, Buddhism seemed to some people to have little to do with daily life, concerning itself instead with the deliverance of the dead and spirits. It led to much misunderstanding and criticism of Buddhism in society.

The purpose of Buddhism is to foster lives grounded in reason, encouraging people to cultivate the Bodhisattva path while in the human realm, with Buddhahood as the ultimate goal. The phrase "Pure Land Buddhism" (also known as "Amidism") refers, in the majority of cases, to the practices that can be discovered all across the world and are intended to make it possible for individuals to achieve rebirth inside these "Buddha-spheres." In this topic, I will discuss the distinctive features of humanist Buddhism as practiced in the Amitābha cult or Pure land Buddhism.

CONTENTS

1, Explanation about Amitābha

Throughout history, the devotional cult of the Pure Land associated with Amitābha Buddha has been exceedingly prominent and widespread. First, we need to understand better who Amitābha Buddha is. In Sanskrit, "Amitābha (amita+ābha) Amita is the negative form of Mita, Mita means to measure. Amita, therefore, means "unmeasured, boundless, infinite". Ābha means Light, ray. So, Amitābha means Immeasurable Light (sometimes translated as Eternal Light), that is, he who enlightens all beings of all quarters. Amitāyus (amita+āyus) means Immeasurable life (sometimes translated as Eternal Life), that is, he who enlightens all beings at all times. Eternal life signifies compassion (Mahākaruṇa); Eternal light signifies wisdom (prajñā)."¹

To explain this, the ninth chapter of the Smaller Sukhāvatīyuha states that: "The light, O Śāriputra, of that Tathāgata is unimpeded over all Buddha-fields. Therefore is that Tathāgata called Amitābha". Again, the eighth chapter of the Smaller Sukhāvatīyuha reads, "The length of life, O Śāriputra, of that Tathāgata and of those men there is immeasurable. Therefore is that Tathāgata called Amitāyus".²

¹ Luis O. Gómez, The Land of Bliss – The Paradise of the Buddha of Measureless Light, Delhi: Motilal Banarsi Dass, 2002, pp.282-283.

² F. Max Muller (ed.) Buddhist Mahāyāna Texts (SBE), vol. 49, Delhi: Motilal Banarsi Dass, 1997, p. 49.

2, Vows taken by Amitābha Buddha:

The Buddha, who had a profound insight into human nature, had a great degree of compassion for humanity and swore to do all in his ability to assist people in overcoming their fears and sorrows, even at the risk of a fair amount of difficulty for himself. When no one was around to see in the distant past, he took the shape of a Bodhisattva to get this reprieve. During his time as Dharmakara Bodhisattva, Amitābha Buddha made a series of 48 vows detailed in the Larger Amitabha Stra.

3, Description of the Pure Land of Amitābha Buddha

In the Smaller Sukhāvatī-vyūha Sūtra, the Sākyamuni Buddha said to Sāriputra: “Now, what do you think, Sāriputra, for what reason is that world called Sukhāvatī? In that world Sukhāvatī, O Sāriputra, there is neither bodily nor mental pain for living beings. The sources of happiness are innumerable there. For that reason is that world called Sukhāvatī. And again, O Sāriputra, that world Sukhāvatī is adorned with seven terraces, with seven rows of palm trees, and with strings of bells. It is enclosed on every side, beautiful, brilliant with the four gems, viz. gold, silver, beryl, and crystal. With such arrays of excellences peculiar to a Buddha country is that Buddha country adorned. ‘And again, O Sāriputra, in that world Sukhāvatī, there are lotus lakes adorned with the seven gems, viz., gold, silver, beryl, crystal, red pearls, diamonds, and corals as the seventh. They are full of water which possesses the eight good qualities, their waters rise as high as the fords and bathing places so that even crows may drink there; they are strewed with golden sand. And in these lotus-lakes, there are all around on the four sides four stairs, beautiful and brilliant with the four gems, viz., gold, silver, beryl, crystal. And on every side of these lotus-lakes gem-trees are growing, beautiful, and brilliant with the seven gems, viz., gold, silver, beryl, crystal, red pearls, diamonds, and corals as the seventh. And in those lotus-lakes lotus-flowers are growing, blue, blue-colored, of blue splendour, blue to behold; yellow, yellow-coloured, of yellow splendour, yellow to behold; red, red-coloured, of red splendour, red to behold; white, white-coloured, of white splendour, white to behold; beautiful, beautifully-coloured, of beautiful splendour, beautiful to behold, and in circumference as large as the wheel of a chariot. ‘And again, O Sāriputra, in that Buddha country there are heavenly musical instruments always played on, and the earth is lovely and of golden colour. And in that Buddha country a flower-rain of heavenly Māndārava blossoms pour down three times every day and three times every night. And the beings who are born there worship before their morning meal a hundred thousand kotis of Buddhas by going to other worlds; and having showered a hundred thousand kotis of flowers upon each Tathāgata, they return to their own world in time for the afternoon rest. With such arrays of excellences peculiar to a Buddha country is that Buddha country adorned’.³

As a consequence of this, he achieved a great many virtues throughout a great many eons of time, turned himself into Amitābha, the Buddha of “Infinite Light and Boundless Life,” and perfected his Buddha-land of Purity, where he is presently abiding in a world of peace and enlightening everyone. There is no suffering in this Pure Land. Hence it is, without a doubt, the happiest and most tranquil location in the world. Clothes, food, and other wondrous things materialize before the occupants when they desire them. When a gentle breeze sweeps through the forest's jewel-laden trees, the symphony of its spiritual teachings fills the air and cleanses the minds of everyone who hears it.

According to the Amitabha sutta, Shakyamuni Buddha stated that Sukhavati (Pure Land) includes “inhabitants (who) do not suffer but only have pleasure, so it is called the Land of Ultimate Bliss.”⁴ All of the Buddhas residing in the ten directions are currently praising this Buddha for his achievements, which they refer to as “Infinite Light and Boundless Life.” If everyone who hears this Buddha's name multiplies it and welcomes it with joy, we shall be reborn in the lovely Land of Purification that the Buddha created. So, those who are born in that Pure Land share in the limitless existence of the Buddha. As soon as they are awakened, their hearts are immediately stirred with compassion for all those who suffer, and they go on to disseminate the Buddha's way of atonement.

4, Cultivation of disciples to Pure Land Buddhism

If people could only let go of their attachments to these illusory and unjustified divisions and return to the purity of their original thoughts, they wouldn't have to worry about being defiled or suffering. People's minds and

³ Luis O. Gomez (tr.) The Land of Bliss, University of Hawaii Press, Honolulu; Kyoto: Shinshu Otaniha, 1966, Delhi: Motilal Banarsi Dass Publishers, 2002, pp. 16-17.

⁴ Master Hsing Yun, Buddhism in Every Step 18, Amitābha Sutra and Pure Land School, Taiwan: Buddha's Light Publishing, 2006, pp. 9-12.

bodies would be free from defilement and suffering, and they would experience the tranquility that comes with that liberation if they would only let go of their attachments to these make-believe and unfounded distinctions and return to the purity of their original minds. The human mind will be ignited into its true essence, Buddhahood, if the light of Buddha's wisdom is focused upon it. This light will illuminate people's minds with its brilliance and awaken confidence in Buddha. People frequently ignore their true minds' affinity for the enlightened wisdom of the Buddha, which causes them to become entangled in worldly desires, attached to the ability to distinguish between good and evil, and then lament their enslavement and suffering. Enlightenment will show up once the mass of incorrect notions has been eliminated. Oddly enough, those who reach Enlightenment will understand that Enlightenment could not exist without false ideas. Buddha's nature never ends. Even if evil people were to be born as animals, ravenous demons, or perish in hell, they would still retain their Buddha essence. The human affinities for Buddhahood are never entirely extinguished, regardless of whether they are buried in the defilement of flesh or hidden at the source of worldly cravings and forgotten.

In the spirit of Amida Buddha's vows, they let go of their earthly attachments and realize the fleeting nature of this world. In addition, they commit their merit to the emancipation of all sentient beings by merging their own lives with those of everyone else, sharing their sufferings and delusions while simultaneously realizing their freedom from the bonds and entanglements of this earthly existence. They do this by fusing their own lives with those of everyone else. They are conscious of the problems and difficulties of life in the outer world and the boundless potential of the Buddha's compassion. Even while they are free to go, arrive, advance, or halt anywhere they like, they choose to remain with those individuals for whom Buddha has compassion.

Consequently, everybody who hears the name of this Amida Buddha is strongly encouraged to invoke it with complete confidence to participate in Buddha's compassion. Because of this, even though the teaching of the Buddha seems to re-direct people through the flames that consume this world of life and death, everyone should nevertheless pay attention to it and accept its guidance.

Amida Buddha's thinking is compassionate and has an infinite capacity for love and knowledge. Because of this, Buddha has the power to save everyone. Those who are the most wicked, who do unspeakable crimes, whose minds are filled by greed, fury, and infatuation; those who lie, abuse, and cheat; those who kill, steal, and act lewdly; those who are near to death as a result of years of horrible acts; these people are bound to lengthy ages of punishment. If these flawed individuals were to recite the holy name of Amida Buddha with concentration, the wrongdoings that would have brought them to the domain of evil might be forgiven. When a person reaches the point where they can correctly speak the holy word, Amida Buddha and the Bodhisattvas of Compassion and Wisdom will meet them and guide them into the Buddha's Land, where they will be born in all the purity of the white lotus. Therefore, everyone needs to commit the word "Namo Amitabha Buddha," which means to put one's whole faith in the Buddha of Unending Light and Eternal Life to memory. In this context, people are happy to create a community of like-minded individuals and pleasant relationships. Even if there may be thousands of residents, there will be true fellowship once everyone knows one another and has empathy for one another.

However, the devil's realm is rife with avarice, darkness, struggle, conflict, swords, and slaughter, as well as with prejudice, hatred, jealousy, cheating, fawning, and other forms of abuse. Imagine that the wisdom of knowledge now illuminates that dominion, that it is drenched in compassion, that faith is starting to grow, and that the joy blooms are starting to release their sweet scent. That devil's realm will then transform into Buddha's Pure Land. When a man achieves Enlightenment, grass, trees, mountains, rivers, and everything else start to throb with fresh life, just like a gentle wind and a few blooms on a branch that signals the arrival of spring. In other words, if a man's mind purifies, so will his surroundings.

Every resident of a place where actual teaching is the rule has a calm, pure mind. All people benefit from the Buddha's unceasing compassion, and His brilliant spirit purifies their minds of all impurities. A pure mind quickly develops into a deep sense, a mind that is in line with the Noble Path, a mind that loves to give and keep the precepts, an enduring mind, a zealous mind, a calm mind, a wise mind, a compassionate mind, and a mind that guides people to enlightenment through a variety of effective methods. The Buddha's Land will be created in this way.

A country that suffers due to social distinctions is turned into a fellowship of like-minded individuals, just as a home with one's wife and children is transformed into a house where Buddha is present. A blood-stained golden mansion cannot serve as the Buddha's permanent residence. If the master's thinking is pure, even a modest cottage with roof chinks that let the moonlight in can be converted into a location where the Buddha will reside. When a Buddha Land is established by a single man with a pure mind, that guy attracts other men with similar minds to

join him in brotherhood. The belief in Buddha grows from person to person, then to family, then to village, then to town, then to cities, then to nations, and finally to the entire world. Indeed, the Buddha Land is built through sincerity and fidelity in disseminating the Dharma.

Indeed, from one perspective, the world with all of its greed, injustice, and bloodshed appears to be a devil's world; however, as people come to believe in Buddha's Enlightenment, blood will be turned into milk, greed into compassion, and at that point, the devil's land will become a Buddha Land of Purity. To empty an ocean with a single scoop may seem impossible, but having the resolve to do so, even if it costs many lives, is the mindset required to attain Buddha's Enlightenment.

The world of Enlightenment, where there is no greed, wrath, ignorance, misery, or agony, but just wisdom and compassion, is where Buddha is waiting. It is a place of tranquility, a haven for people who experience pain, grief, and anguish, and a place of rest for those who take a vacation from spreading Dharma's teachings.

There is endless Light and eternal Life in this Pure Land. Those who find this haven will never go back to the illusionary world. The Amitabha Sutra describes the last resting place of all people as being in this Pure Land, where the flowers scent the air with wisdom, and the birds sing the holy Dharma.

While it is true that this Pure Land is a place to rest, it is not a place to pass the time inactively. Its beds of fragrant flowers are not for sluggish indolence but are areas for refreshment and repose, where one can refuel with vigor to carry on the Buddha's mission of enlightenment. The purpose of the Buddha will never end. His quest will continue for as long as there are people, creatures, and greedy, depraved brains that construct their realities and circumstances. The Buddha's offspring, who have entered the Pure Land thanks to the enormous might of Amida, might be eager to return to the place from which they initially originated and still retain connections.

There they shall participate in the Buddha's work. The light of the Buddha's compassion will perpetually transfer from one mind to another, just as the light of a little candle would spread from one to another in succession. The Buddha's descendants, comprehending His compassion, take up His mission of enlightenment and purification and transmit it from one generation to the next to make the Buddha's Land glorious forever and ever.

CONCLUSION

The lessons of the Pure Land are not just relevant and applicable in the material world. They make sure that the needs and practices are consistent with the truth and that they help the individual, the community, the nation, and the world in every way possible, both now and in the hereafter. There are no internal or external tensions or worries about the future against the present.

The teachings of the Pure Land encourage us to develop a dislike for this world and a yearning for the Land of Bliss. It's the same as taking the lid off a boiler and turning off the heat from within. Though the fires of avarice and rage have not been extinguished, and the waves of knowledge have not yet formed, the tension is rapidly dissipated. We're relieved, content, and joyful. Pure Land believers of the present day have not snuffed out their avarice and wrath. They are profoundly aware of the pain and disquiet these conditions cause individuals, communities, the country, and the globe. They have adopted a fundamental stance of aversion and letting go because they no longer seek out experiences that put them at odds with themselves, other people, or the world. Such a course of action would make matters far worse for everyone involved.

Pure Land adherents, at their core, are not interested in material things. They don't care about anything and don't have strong feelings for anything or anyone. They have no preconceived preconceptions about what is good or bad. They are at peace now that they have let go. They have a harmonious perspective on life in general. It's the equivalent of shifting the fire out from under the boiler so it can warm more bodies.

As they contemplate the Land of Bliss, one hundred thousand *koti* Buddha lands distant, the minds of Pure Land practitioners become calm and at rest. There, they may relax and refresh their brains. Even their gaze is directed in that direction. They are no longer a part of this earth and no longer care about owning anything from it, not even a single leaf or blade of grass. They come from another dimension. The Pure Land tradition of Amitabha Buddha is like a safety valve for the pressures and stresses that build up inside people and the planet as a whole. It alleviates pain and aids in attaining ultimate peace and joy by directing our thoughts toward the pure, beautiful, brilliant, and tranquil Pure Land.

The troubled, conflicted human world needs Buddhism's compassion, purity, and dignified serenity. Buddhism's ultimate aim is to deliver its adherents permanent peace and contentment via its teachings of enlightening knowledge and calm joy.

ABBREVIATIONS

DN. : Dīgha Nikāya
 SN. : Saṃyutta Nikāya
 Dh.p : Dhammapada

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