

佛说阿弥陀经要解

Commentary on the Amitabha Sutra

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Translated by Dr. J. C. Cleary ---- Mind-Seal of Buddhas
Humbly Revised by Dr. Edwin Sha 沙行勉 based on my understanding of the scriptures.

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原夫诸佛悯念群迷，随机施化。虽**归元无二**，而方便多门。然于一切方便之中，求其至直捷、至圆顿者，则莫若念佛求生净土。又于一切念佛法门之中，求其至简易、至稳当者，则莫若**信愿专持名号**。

The Buddhas took pity on all the deluded sentient beings, and taught them based on the opportunities and the various potentials of these deluded sentient beings. Although there is no difference in the ultimate goal as we take the Buddha's teaching: i.e., returning ourselves to our pure mind, many different expedient methods are employed.

Among all these expedients, if we seek the most direct and fast, and the most perfect and **sudden**, none is as good as seeking birth in the Pure Land through **Buddha-remembrance**. The simplest and most reliable one among all the methods of Buddha-Remembrance is to develop faith and vows and to concentrate on reciting the Buddha-name.

是故净土三经并行于世，而古人独以《阿弥陀经》列为日课。岂非有见于持名一法，普被三根，摄**事理**以无遗，统宗教而无外，尤为不可思议也哉！

The Amitabha Sutra shows that the method of reciting the Buddha-name applied to people with different capacities. It encompasses the level of phenomena and the level of inner truth (noumenon), omitting nothing. It embraces all sections of Buddhism and Scriptures of Buddhism, and leaves nothing out. This method is indeed inconceivably great. This is the reason that the ancients took the Amitabha Sutra as their daily study guide, though three Pure Land scriptures (as Amitabha Sutra is one of them) have circulated side by side in the world over the generations.

古来注疏，代不乏人，世远就湮，所存无几。云栖和尚著为《疏钞》，广大精微。幽溪师伯述《圆中钞》，高深洪博。盖如日月中天，有目皆睹，特以文富义繁，边涯莫测，或致初机浅识，信愿难阶。

There have been many people to comment upon and explain the Amitabha Sutra. Over time, many of these commentaries have been oblivion and nowadays not many survive. Master Yun-Qi (Lian-Chi, 1535-1615) wrote his extensive and subtle commentary and my senior fellow teacher, Mater You-Xi, wrote another one, called “Perfect Middle Path Commentary”, which is profound and highly learned. These two commentaries are like the sun and the moon: all those with eyes see them. But in these two commentaries, the literary style is elaborate and the level of meaning is complex. Their ultimate reaches are unfathomable for beginners.

故复弗揣庸愚，再述《要解》。不敢与二翁竞异，亦不必与二翁强同。譬如侧看成峰，横看成岭，纵皆不尽庐山真境，要不失为各各亲见庐山而已。将释经文，五重玄义。

Therefore I have put aside all qualms about my own mediocrity and ignorance and composed another commentary, explaining the essential points of the Amitabha Sutra. I would not dare to diverge from the two elders just to be original, nor would I force myself to agree with them for the sake of agreement. It is as if we look at a same mountain from different angles, so none of us can fully describe the true realms of the “mountain,” as each one of us can only give you the record of our personal encounters. Before I explain the sutra, I will first present the summary of the sutra using five classifications.

【五重玄义】又名五重玄谈，天台智者大师在讲解佛经之时，皆立五重之玄义。

- 一、释名，即解释经题；
- 二、辨体，即辨别一经之中枢旨归；
- 三、明宗，说明修行之宗旨；
- 四、论用，由宗旨而论一经之作用；
- 五、判教，判别教义之大小权实。

【五重玄义】第一释名，无名，则不能显法。故应先释经题。第二辨体，名者呼体故，名之次宜辨体，体者一部之旨归，众义之中枢也。第三明宗，宗者修行之宗旨也。会体必由修行。故体之次宜明宗。第四论用，会体而自行已圆，则应自体起用，利益众生。故就宗而论一经之作用。第五判教，利益已多，则所说之教义无尽，故用之次宜判教义之大小权实。已上五重。就法华经释之。则与咸之法华撮要曰：“此经乃以法譬为名，实相为体，一乘因果为宗，断疑生信为用，无上醍醐为教相。”

第一释名。此经以能说所说人为名。佛者，此土能说之教主，即释迦牟尼。乘大悲愿力，生五浊恶世。以先觉觉后觉，无法不知，无法不见者也。

First, the title of the sutra is explained. This sutra takes its title from the one who expounds it and from the one of whom he speaks.

Buddha is the master teacher in the world, that is, Sakyamuni. By the power of his vows of great compassion, he was born here in the world of the **Five Turbidities**. As the one enlightened, he was determined to bring enlightenment to others who have not. Buddha is the one who knows all and sees all.

[佛教以五浊说明世界的丑恶。

- 一、劫浊，言时代遭逢恶运，灾难频生；
- 二、烦恼浊，指世人心中充满贪、嗔、痴等烦恼；
- 三、众生浊，指众生资质低劣，苦多乐少；
- 四、见浊，指邪见流行，思想混乱；
- 五、命浊，指众生因恶业受报，心身交瘁，寿命短促。]

说者，悦所怀也。佛以度生为怀，众生成佛机熟，为说难信法，令究竟脱，故悦也。

Buddha speaks the sutra with joy in his heart. Buddha's intention is to liberate sentient beings. Since the potential of sentient being to achieve Buddhahood is ripe, Buddha expounds for them these Pure Land teachings which are difficult to believe. He intended to help them reach ultimate liberation. That's why he is filled with joy.

阿弥陀，所说彼土之导师，以四十八愿，接信愿念佛众生极乐世界，永阶不退者也。

梵语阿弥陀，此云无量寿，亦云无量光。要之功德智慧，神通道力，依正庄严，说法化度，一一无量也。

Amitabha Buddha is the one Sakyamuni refers to in the sutra. Amitabha is the master teacher (guiding teacher) of the Pure Land. By the power of his forty-eight vows, he receives the sentient beings who have vowed to practice Buddha-remembrance by invoking the Buddha name to be born in the Land of Ultimate Bliss, and then they will never fall back from there.

The Sanskrit name "Amitabha" means "Infinite Life" and "Infinite Light". The meanings of the name manifest his merits and his wisdom, his supernatural power and depth of cultivation, the grandeur of the environment and the people in Pure Land, his teachings and the liberation of sentient beings, all infinite.

一切金口，通名为经。对上五字，是通别合为题也。教行理三，各论通别，广如台藏所明。

A sutra is what Buddha said.

These terms taken from general and particular senses make up the title of the scripture: The Amitabha Sutra Spoken by Buddha. The three categories --- **teachings, practice, and inner truth (noumenon)**, which each sutra should have --- can each be explained in both general and particular senses, as set out in the Tien-Tai system.

【二宗释题】

天台、贤首二宗之释经题，有通别、能所之异。1.台宗以通别二义而释经题，如‘妙法莲华经’，上四字是别，为经之专名，故别。经之一字则为通，一切诸经皆云经。2.贤首宗：则必以能诠之文与所诠之义判别。如大方广佛华严经，上六字为所诠，经一字为能诠，余经亦然！

第二辨体。大乘经皆以**实相**为正体。**吾人现前一念心性**，不在内，不在外，不在中间。非过去，非现在，非未来。非青黄赤白，长短方圆。非香，非味，**非触，非法**。觅之了不可得，而不可言其无。具造百界千如，而不可言其有。离一切**缘虑**分别，语言文字相。**而缘虑分别，语言文字，非离此别有自性。**

Second, explain the essence of the sutra to discern.

The true essence of all the Great Vehicle (Mahayana) scriptures is Absolute Reality (also known as Real Suchness or Original Nature or Buddh Mind) itself. What is Absolute Reality? Lets look at the essence of our mind coming at each instant. It is not inside, not outside, and not in between. It is not past, not present, and not future. It is not green or yellow or red or white, long or short or square or round. It is not a scent, not a flavor, not a **texture that can be touched**, not a mental object. When we search for it, we cannot find it, but we cannot say it does not exist. It creates all worlds and all realms, but we cannot say it exists. It is detached from **conditional thoughts** and discriminations, from all words and characteristics. But conditional thoughts, discriminations, words and characteristics do not have any identity apart from it.

//(沙行勉)要了解这一段话，要读大乘起信论。实相也叫做真如。可以从生灭门和真如门去趋近它。它是没有办法去“理解”，“推演”，“感知”，所以他是“空”，但是不能说它是没有。各位，最难理解的是为什么它是“具造百界千如”？我建议各位暂时搁置这个问题。还是想着“空”观。等到真的能证到“人空”和“法空”，我相信自然一切完有就出来了。举个粗浅的例子，就好像，我们眼睛看到的，耳朵听到的，和看不到、听不到的、都不过是各种波动（光波、声波、等等）罢了。刹那变动，我们执着为有，还起各种念头、想法、执着、烦恼。其实波动都是短暂而没有实体的。就以这波动为例，波动是表象、是“事”，这“波动性”是性、是“理”。波动性就好像是此所讲的“实相”般。因为这个相同的波动性，这世界能起无数种波动相、可以是光怪离奇，可以是神圣清妙。但是就其本质还是如一。

【实相】实者，非虚妄之义，相者无相也。是指称万有本体之语。曰法性，曰真如，曰实相，其体同一也。就其为万法体性之义言之，则为法性；就其体真实常住之义言之，则为真如；就此真实常住为万法实相之义言之，则为实相。其他所谓一实，一如，一相，无相，法身，法证，法位，涅槃，无为，真谛，真性，真空，实性，实谛，实际，皆是实相之异名。又依名随德用之三谛言之，则空谛为真如，假谛为实相，中谛为法界。法华说实相，华严说法界，解深密说真如或无为，般若说般若佛母，楞伽说如来藏，涅槃说佛性，阿含说涅槃。在华严之始教天台之通教已下者，不变之空真如为实相，在华严之终教已上，天台之别教已上者，不变随缘之二相为实相。华严以随缘之万法为实相，天台真言以性具之诸法为实相，小乘以我空之涅槃，大乘以我法二空之涅槃为实相。维摩经弟子品曰：“迦旃延无以生灭心行说实相法。”同观众生品曰：“佛为实相法人。”涅槃经四十曰：“无相之相，名为实相。”妙玄二上曰：“实相之境，非佛天人所作，本自有之，非遍今也。”法华文句记四中曰：“言实相者，非虚故实。非相为相，故名实相。”顿悟入道要门论上曰：“法性空者，即一切处无心是。若得一切处无心时，即无有一相可得。何以故？为自性空故无一相可得，无一相可得者，即是实相，实相者，即是如来妙色身相也。”

要之离一切相，即一切法。离故无相，即故无不相，不得已强名实相。

Essentially, absolute reality is detached from all forms, but merged with all things. Being detached from forms, it is formless, and being merged with all things, it is all-formed. For lack of an alternative term, we impose on it the name “absolute reality” [i.e., Buddha Mind, Buddha Nature].

//(沙行勉)可以稍微用“波动性”来理解。当我们看到一朵花时，绝对不会从花去看到波动性。所以可以理解波动性是“离一切相”。同样的，没有了波动性的存在，我们是看不见花的。所以就好像是“即一切法”。

实相之体，非寂非照，而复寂而恒照，照而恒寂。照而寂，强名常寂光土。寂而照，强名清净法身。又照寂强名法身，寂照强名报身。又性德寂照名法身，修德寂照名报身。又修德照寂名受用身，修德寂照名应化身。

The essence of Absolute Reality is neither quiescent nor aware, but it is both quiescent and yet ever shining with awareness, both shining with awareness and yet ever quiescent. In that is shining with awareness but quiescent, it is called the **Land of Eternally Quiescent Light**. In that it is quiescent but shining with awareness, it is called the pure **Dharmakaya** (Dharma Body). Aware quiescence is called the Dharmakaya, the Dharma Body of all the Buddhas. Quiescent awareness is called the Sambhogakaya, the **Reward Body**. The quiescent shining of Buddha nature is named as Dharma Body. The quiescent shining of the practice of Buddha nature is named Reward Body. From the view point of practice of Buddha nature, practicing Buddha nature with shining quiescence is called Reward Body and practicing Buddha nature with quiescent shining is called **Incarnation Body**.

//[沙行勉]: 此段较难懂。可以强想成“法身“如月体，“报身“如月光。“应化身“如“千江有水千江月“。或者可以说法身如波动性，报身如电波，应化身如电视所显示的影像。只有菩萨能见到报身，而我们一般凡夫只能随着电视机的开启（成住坏空）才能见到应化身。所以，广义来讲，法身为寂，报身显照。法身表性德，报身和应化身表修德。此两身的代表的修德亦有所差别。报身的修德在于无住而生心。应化身的修德在于生心而无住。

【照寂】真如之妙用照十方曰照。真如之妙体离诸过曰寂。妙用之当相为寂体曰照寂。寂体之当处为妙用曰寂照。

寂照不二，身土不二，性修不二，真应不二，无非实相。实相不二，亦无不二。

Quiescence and awareness are not two, bodies and environments are not two, nature and practice are not two, true essence and responsive functions are not two --- everything is nothing but absolute reality. In terms of absolute reality, all these seemly dualities neither two nor not two.

//[沙行勉]:在实相的面前。色即是空，空即是色。

是故举体作依作正，作法作报，作自作他。

乃至能说所说，能度所度，能信所信，能愿所愿，能持所持，能生所生，能赞所赞，无非实相正印之所印也。

Therefore, the essence of reality builds up both the environment that surrounds sentient beings and their very bodies. It builds up both the Dharma Body and the Reward Body of the Buddhas. It builds up both self and others.

Furthermore the one who speaks the sutra (Sakyamuni) and the one who is spoken of (Amitabha), the Buddhas who liberates sentient beings and the sentient beings who are liberated, the ability to believe (mind) and that which is believed in (dharma), the ability to take vows and that which is vowed, the ability to concentrate on the Buddha-name (body, mouth and mind) and the Buddha-name which is concentrated upon, the ability to be born in the Pure Land (faith, vow and practice) and birth in the Pure Land itself, the ability to praise the Buddhas and the Buddhas who are praised --all of these are the imprint of the "true seal" of absolute reality. [Thus the Buddha Nature of sentient beings (absolute reality) is the true essence of all Mahayana Sutras.]

第三**明宗**。宗是修行要径，会体枢机，而万行之纲领也。提纲则众目张，挈领则襟袖至。故体后应须辨宗。

此经以**信愿持名**为修行之宗要。非信不足启愿，非愿不足导行，非持名妙行不足满所愿而证所信。

Third is to understand the principle of the sutra. The **guiding principle** is the essential route for cultivating practice, the key link for understanding the essence [of our mind], and the guiding framework for the myriad practices. When you hold up a net, the mesh opens up. When you lift the collar of a shirt, the breast and sleeves come too. Thus, after the essence, we must discern the guiding principle.

The essential principle for cultivation in this sutra is to *develop faith and vows and to recite the Buddha-name*. Without faith, we are not sufficiently equipped to take vows. Without vows, we are not sufficiently equipped to guide our practice. Without the wondrous practice of reciting the Buddha-name, we are not sufficiently equipped to fulfill our vows and to bring our faith to fruition.

经中先陈依正以生信，次劝发愿以导行，次示持名以径登**不退**。

信则信自，信他，信因，信果，信事，信理。

愿则厌离娑婆，欣求极乐。

行则执持名号，一心不乱。

The sutra first sets forth the environment of the Pure Land and the exalted embodiment of its inhabitants in order to engender *faith* in us. Next it urges us to take *vows* to lead our practice. Then it teaches us the practice of reciting the Buddha-name as the route to reach the Pure Land, upon which we will never fall back.

Faith means having faith in oneself and faith in others. It means being sure about cause and effect, about phenomena and inner truth (noumenon).

Vows mean feeling aversion to the mundane world and detaching from it. Vows mean gladly seeking the Pure Land of Ultimate Bliss.

Practice means persisting in the practice of reciting the Buddha-name **singlemindedly and without delusion or confusion (with one-pointedness of mind)**.

信自者，信我现前一念之心，本非肉团，亦非缘影；竖无初后，横绝边涯；**终日随缘，终日不变**。

十方虚空微尘国土，元我一念心中所现物。我虽昏迷倒惑，苟一念回心，决定得生，自心本具极乐，更无疑虑。是名信自。

Believe in ourselves. Believing the Mind that can recite Buddha-name is not a physical entity, or the thoughts responsive to outside objects. It extends through time without any before or after and through space without any boundaries. Though it appears to follow causal conditions all day long, it never changes.

All of space in the ten directions and all the worlds countless as atoms are things manifested by this Mind of ours. Although we are deluded and confused, if for a single moment we return to this Mind, we are sure to be born in the Land of Ultimate Bliss originally inherent in our own mind, and be troubled no more by worry and doubt. This is called "believing in ourselves".

信他者，信释迦如来决无诳语，弥陀世尊决无虚愿，六方诸佛广长舌决无二言。随顺诸佛真实教诲，决志求生，更无疑惑。是名信他。

Believe in others. Have faith that the Tathagata Sakyamuni certainly did not lie, and that the World Honored One Amitabha certainly did not take his vows in vain. Believe that all the Buddhas of all the directions never equivocated. Believe to follow the true teachings of all the enlightened ones, so to establish our will to seek birth in the Pure Land without any doubt or confusion. This is called "believing in others".

信因者，深信散乱称名，犹为成佛种子，况一心不乱，安得不生净土。是名信因。

Believe in the causal basis. Have faith that even invocation of Buddha-name carried out in a scattered confused state of mind is still a seed of enlightenment, and that this is even more true of invoking the Buddha-name singlemindedly and without confusion. [If we sincerely and singlemindedly invoke the name of Amitabha Buddha], how can we fail to be born in the Pure Land? This is called "believing in the causal basis" [i.e., that recitation is the cause of seeking birth in Pure Land.].

信果者，深信净土，诸善聚会，皆从念佛三昧得生，如种瓜得瓜，种豆得豆，亦如影必随形，响必应声，决无虚弃。是名信果。

Believe in the result. Have deep faith that the Pure Land and all the good people assembling there are born from the **Buddha Remembrance Samadhi** [the meditative concentration that comes from reciting the Buddha-name]. When you plant melon seeds you get melons, and when you plant beans you get beans. [Effect follows causes] like a shadow follows a physical shape, like an echo responds to a sound. Nothing is sown in vain. This is called "believing in the result".

信事者，深信只今现前一念不可尽故，依心所现十方世界亦不可尽。实有极乐国在十万亿土外，最极清净庄严，不同庄生寓言。是名信事。

Believe factual phenomena. Have deep faith that since this mind of ours is infinite, the worlds of the ten directions that appear based on it are inexhaustible. The Land of Ultimate Bliss really does exist ten billion Buddha-lands away, ultimate pure and sublime. This is not some fable from Chuang-tzu. This is called "believing factual phenomena".

信理者，深信十万亿土，实不出我今现前介尔一念心外，以吾现前一念心性实无外故。又深信西方依正主伴，皆吾现前一念心中所现影。**全事即理，全妄即真，全修即性，全他即自。**

我心遍故，佛心亦遍，一切众生心性亦遍。譬如一室千灯，光光互遍，重重交摄，不相妨碍。是名信理。

Believe in inner truth (noumenon). Have deep faith that the countless Buddha-lands (worlds) are in reality not outside our **"tiny" Mind of Buddha remembrance** since there is really nothing outside of this Mind. We have deep certainty that the whole array of beings and surroundings in the Pure Land is a set of reflections appearing in our mind. All phenomena are merged with inner truth. All falsity is merged with truth. All practices are merged with True Nature. All others are merged with oneself.

Our own inherent mind is all-pervasive, and the Buddha-mind is also all-pervasive, and the true nature of the minds of sentient beings is also all-pervasive. It is like a thousand lamps in one room, each of whose lights shines on all the others and merges with the other lights without any obstruction. This is called "believing in inner truth" (Noumenon).

// 【沙行勉：事理要一起看。有人念佛到一心不乱，可以穿门而过。有人开悟时(如虚云法师)，可以当下看见数里外的景象。菩萨们可以在一瞬间去千百亿佛土，见千百亿佛，等等，都是真实的例证。打个比喻，这可以理解成我们每一个心识的妄动像是个漩涡的波动。当波动一旦静了下来，风淡云清，与周遭空气没有差别。就是你中有我，我中有你。若你的心只有自己，那你只能看到自己。若你的心能大到包含你的亲人，那你能感受到你亲人的感受。若你的心能大到宇宙万物，那宇宙万物就在你的一心之中了 – 大菩萨的境界了。】

如此信已，则**娑婆**即自心所感之秽，而自心秽，理应厌离。极乐即自心所感之净，而自心净，理应欣求。厌秽须舍至究竟，方无可舍。欣净须取至究竟，方无可取。

[**Vows**]. Once we have these forms of faith, then we must understand that the **mundane world** is the defilement brought about by our own minds, so we must detach from it; the Pure Land is the purity brought about by our own minds, so we must joyously seek it. We must renounce defilement utterly, until there is nothing that can be renounced, and we must grasp purity utterly, until there is nothing more that can be grasped.

故《妙宗》云：取舍若极，与不取舍亦非异辙。设不从事取舍，但尚不取不舍，即是**执理废事**。既废于事，理亦不圆。

若达全事即理，则取亦即理，舍亦即理。一取一舍，无非法界。故次信而明愿也。

Therefore the commentary *Miao-tsung* said: If you reject (or grasp) everything, it is not different from rejecting (grasp) nothing. (You still have the mind of “everything” and “nothing”.) If you intend not to engage in grasping and rejecting, and only value *not* grasping and *not* rejecting, (You still have the mind of “rejecting” and “grasping.”.) this is a form of **clinging to inner truth and abandoning phenomena**. Then, you abandon the phenomenal level, and you are not complete at the inner truth level.

If you arrive at the point where all phenomena are merged with inner truth, then both grasping and rejecting are also merged with inner truth. Any grasping or rejecting is not the realm of reality. Here we have clarified the vows.

[沙注：取、舍俱离。取取、取舍俱离。舍取、舍舍俱离。离亦离、离离亦离、无所可离、无所亦离。其理无法描述、无法定义。一切表述都如同瞎子摸象般。菩萨证得此理。所以行事处事，无不自在、通达。]

// 【沙行勉：**愿则厌离娑婆，欣求极乐**。这段漂亮啊！其实是自己内心污秽，故需厌离。而欣求极乐的愿望，其实就是将自己内心清静如极乐世界般。】

言执持名号一心不乱者，名以召德，德不可思议，故名号亦不可思议。名号功德不可思议，故使散称为佛种，**执持登不退也**。

[Practice]. When we speak of concentrating on invoking the Buddha-name singlemindedly, with a mind that is unified and not chaotic, we are using the Buddha-name to summon up the qualities of Buddhahood. Since the qualities of Buddhahood are inconceivable, the Buddha-name itself is also inconceivable. Since the merits of the Buddha-name are inconceivable, even if we recite the Buddha-name in a scattered state of mind, it is still a seed of enlightenment, **and if we recite Buddha-name singlemindedly, we will reach the Pure Land and until then it is impossible for us to retreat.**

然诸经示净土行，万别千差。如观像、观想、礼拜供养、**五悔六念**等，一一行成，皆生净土。

Many sutras teach Pure Land practices of various kinds: **contemplating** the image of Buddha, contemplating the concept of Buddha, doing **prostrations**, making offerings, practicing the five forms of repentance and the six forms of **mindfulness**, and so on. If

you **consummate** any of these practices, [and dedicate the merits toward rebirth in the Pure Land], you will be born there.

[五种的忏悔方法。天台智者大师为了修习法华三昧的人，依据弥勒问经，占察经与普贤观经等之意，而订出五种的忏悔方法，即

- 一、忏悔，发露自己已往之罪而诫将来；
- 二、劝请，劝请十方诸佛以转法轮；
- 三、随喜，对于自他一切善根随喜赞叹；
- 四、回向，以所修之功德趣向于众生及佛道；
- 五、发愿，发四弘愿以导引前面之四行。]

[一、念佛，念佛具足十号，有大慈大悲大光明，神通无量，能拔除众生之苦，我欲与佛一样；
二、念法，念如来所说之一切法，有大功德，乃无上妙药，我欲证之而施与众生；
三、念僧，念僧是如来弟子，得无漏法，具足戒定慧，为世间之福田，我也想修僧之行；
四、念戒，念戒行有大势力，能防一切之恶，我欲精进持戒；
五、念施，念布施有大功德，既能拔人之苦，且能去除自己之悭贪，我欲以布施普利众生；
六、念天，念诸天有自然之快乐，皆由往昔勤修十善之因，我亦欲勤修善业，以便善因得善果。]

唯持名一法，收机最广，下手最易。故释迦慈尊，无问自说，特向大智舍利弗拈出，**可谓方便中第一方便，了义中无上了义，圆顿中最极圆顿。**

The method of reciting the Buddha-name is the one that is the most all-conclusive, embracing people of all **mentalities** and the one that is the easiest to practice. This is why the compassionate one, Sakyamuni Buddha, explained it to **Shariputra** without being asked. *Reciting the Buddha-name can be called the number one expedient among all the expedient methods in practices, the supreme one among all the methods in understanding the Buddha's teaching, and the most perfect one among all the complete methods in finding the inner truth of Buddhahood.*

故云：清珠投于浊水，浊水不得不清；**佛号投于乱心，乱心不得不佛也。**信愿持名，以为一乘真因。四种净土，以为一乘妙果。举因则果必随之，

There is a saying: "If a purifying pearl is put into dirty water, the dirty water cannot but be purified. If the Buddha-name is put into a chaotic mind, the chaotic mind must approach to enlightened. Reciting the Buddha-name with faith and vows is a true causal basis for the Supreme Vehicle. The four kinds of Pure Land [**the Land Where Saints and Ordinary Beings Dwell Together, the Land of Expedient Liberation with Incompleteness, the Land of Real Reward, and the Land of Eternally Quiescent Light**] are the wondrous fruits of the One Vehicle. If you have the causal basis, then the result is sure to follow.

[成佛唯一之教也。乘为车乘，以譬佛之教法。教法能载人运于涅槃岸，故谓之乘。法华经专说此一乘之理。法华经方便品曰：“十方佛土中，唯有一乘法，无二亦无三，除佛方便说。”同品曰：“诸佛如来，以方便力，于一佛乘，分别说三。”同品曰：“唯此一事实，余二则非真。”文句四上曰：“圆顿之教，为一佛乘。”胜鬘经曰：“一乘即是第一义乘。”胜鬘宝窟上本曰：“一乘者，至道无二，故称为一。运用自在，目之为乘。”]

故以信愿持名为经正宗。其四种净土之相，详在《妙宗钞》，及《梵网玄义》，兹不具述。俟后释依正文中，当略示耳。

Therefore, faith, vows and reciting the Buddha-name are the true guiding principles of the *Amitabha Sutra*.

The characteristics of the four kinds of Pure Land are described in detail in the *Miao-tsung* commentary on the sutra and in the book *An explanation of the Brahma Net Sutra*, and I will not explain them in full here. Later on I will give a brief account of them as I explicate the text.

第四明力用。此经以往生不退为力用。往生有四土，各论九品。且略明得生四土之相：若执持名号，未断见思，随其或散或定，于同居土分三辈九品；

Fourth, there is the sutra's Power and Application.

The power and application of this sutra is to enable us to be reborn in the Pure Land and never fall back. Rebirth in the Pure Land can be categorized in terms of the Four Pure Lands, and also into nine grades in each land. Here I will give a brief explanation of the characteristics of the Four Lands.

If you recite the Buddha-name without cutting off your delusions of views and thoughts, depending on how scattered or how concentrated you are, you are reborn in the level of the Land Where Saints and Ordinary Beings Live Together.

若持至事一心不乱，见思任运先落，则生方便有余净土；

若至理一心不乱，豁破无明一品，乃至四十一品，则生实报庄严净土，亦分证常寂光土；若无明断尽，则是上上实报，究竟寂光也。

If you recite the Buddha-name to the point of singlemindedness (phenomenal level) and your delusions of views and thoughts are naturally dropped off, you are born in the Land of Expedient Liberation with incompleteness [where Arhats live].

If you recite the Buddha-name to the point of singlemindedness (noumenon or inner truth level), and you smash from one to forty-one levels of **unclearness**, then you are born in the Pure Land of Real Reward [where Bodhisattvas live].

If you recite the Buddha-name to the point that unclearness is totally disappeared, this is the highest reward and you will be reborn in the Land of Eternally Quiescent Light.

// 【无明，不好翻译。这里是指根本无明。英文没有相对的字。假如翻成 Ignorance，就和“痴”同义。我现在简单的翻译成 unclearness。】

不退有四义：一念不退。破无明，显佛性，径生实报，分证寂光。二行不退。见思既落，尘沙亦破，生方便土，进趋极果。

There are four meanings in no-retreat: **contemplation never retreats, practice never retreats, status never retreats, and finality never retreats**. 1. After breaking the unclearness, revealing Buddha nature, people can reach the birth of the Land of Real Reward, and also touch the Land of Eternally Quiescent Light. 2. After removing the confusions in views and thoughts, and breaking the countless dust-like confusion, people can reach the Land of Expedient Liberation with Incompleteness, and go toward to enlightenment.

三位不退。带业往生，在同居士，莲华托质，永离退缘。四毕竟不退。不论至心散心，有心无心，或解不解，但弥陀名号，或六方佛名，此经名字，一经于耳，假使千万劫后，毕竟因斯度脱。如闻涂毒鼓，远近皆丧，食少金刚，决定不消也。

3. After giving birth to Pure Land with karma, people will reach the land where Saints and Ordinary Beings Dwell Together, in which people are born by the supported of lotus flower (pure land environment), and never have any possibility of retreat. 4. No matter with concentration or not, with mindfulness or not, with understanding or not, hearing Amitabha Buddha name or any Buddha's names will give the seed to the finality of reaching enlightenment. It is like people will get affected when they hear the beating of poisonous drums no matter they are near by or far away from the drum, and people will not digest the diamonds no matter how little they eat.

复次只带业生同居净证位不退者，皆与补处俱，亦皆一生必补佛位。夫上善一处，是生同居，即已横生上三土，一生补佛。是位不退，即已圆证三不退。

Furthermore, even those who give birth with karma to the land where Saints and Ordinary Beings Dwell Together have the same guarantee of no-retreats as the people in other three lands. They will become enlightened in one life-time there. Because people are always with supreme saints in the land where Saints and Ordinary Beings Dwell Together, this land is already a no-retreat step-stone to other three lands. One life-time to Buddhahood and no retreat in status show that with the birth to any place in Pure Land, people have reached the guarantee of no-retreats.

如斯力用，乃千经万论所未曾有。较彼顿悟正因，仅为出尘阶渐，生生不退，始可期于佛阶者，不可同日语矣。宗教之士，如何勿思。

The *Amitabha Sutra* has this kind of powerful function, which no text has ever described. The powerful function of the *Amitabha Sutra* is far beyond other methods. For example, a correct causal basis to a sudden enlightenment is just a stepping stone for people out of the sensory world, which must be cultivated lifetime after lifetime before you can expect enlightenment. How can Zen Buddhists and Scriptural Buddhists fail to consider this?

第五教相。此大乘菩萨藏摄。又是无问自说，彻底大慈之所加持，能令末法多障有情，依斯径登不退。故当来经法灭尽，特留此经住世百年，

Fifth, there are the forms of the Buddhist teaching in this sutra to explain.

The sutra belongs to the **Mahayana canon, Bodhisattva vehicle**, and is "self-spoken" [delivered by the Buddha without being asked].

This sutra has enabled sentient beings with many karmic obstructions, living in the **Dharma Ending Age** to make a direct ascent toward enlightenment without falling back.

Thus, in the future when all the other sutras have perished, this *Amitabha Sutra* will survive for another century, to bring deliverance on a wide scale to sentient beings.

广度含识。阿伽陀药，万病总持，绝待圆融，不可思议。华严奥藏，法华秘髓，一切诸佛之心要，菩萨万行之司南，皆不出于此矣。欲广叹述，穷劫莫尽，智者自当知之。

The *Amitabha Sutra* is a remedy for all sicknesses. It is beyond relativities, a perfect fusion, with inconceivable power. The mystic treasury of the **Flower Ornament (Avatamsaka) Sutra**, the secret gist of the **Lotus Sutra**, the essential teachings on mind of all the Buddhas, the compass of all the Bodhisattvas' myriad practices -- none of them is outside of this sutra. If I wanted to praise it at length, at the end of time I still would not be finished. Those with wisdom please know the functions and characteristics of this wondrous sutra.

入文分三：初序分、二正宗分、三流通分。此三名初善、中善、后善。序如首，五官具存。正宗如身，脏腑无阙。流通如手足，运行不滞。

[EXPLANATION OF THE TEXT]

The text of the sutra is divided into three sections. The first portion is the introduction. The second portion is the main body of the text that gives the major guiding principles. The third portion is about the transmission of the text. These three parts are called the excellent opening, the excellent middle, and the excellent ending.

The introduction is like the head, complete with facial features. The main body of the text is like the body, complete with all the internal organs. The transmission portion is like the hands and feet, which move unimpeded.

故智者释《法华》，初一品皆为序，后十一品半皆为流通。又一时迹本二门，各分三段。则法师等五品，皆为迹门流通。盖序必提一经之纲，流通则法施不壅，关系非小。后人不达，见经文稍涉义理，便判入正宗。致序及流通，仅存故套。安所称初语亦善，后语亦善也哉。

A good example can be seen by the way that Master Chi-Zhe explaining Lotus Flower sutra, a significant portion of the sutra was categorized as the parts of introduction and transmissions. In sum, the introduction covers the overall structure of the sutra, while the transmission portion shows that the **bestowal** of the teaching has been unimpeded. The connection of these two portions with the main body of the sutra is not a minor matter. Lately people have not understood this. When they read the sutras, if the text is a little bit related to the principles, they categorize the text into the main body, treating the introduction and the transmission portion as if they were merely formalistic. If this were true, why are we told that both the opening words and the closing words of a sutra are also excellent?

（甲）初序分二：初通序、二别序。（乙）初通序分二：初标法会时处、二引大众同闻。（丙）今初

[Introductory portion of sutra]

The introductory portion of the Amitabha Sutra has two parts: The general introduction part is applied to all Buddhist sutras, and the particular part is unique to this sutra. The general part first reveals the time and place of the Dharma assembly at which it was expounded, and then describes the assembly of those who were present.

如是我闻。一时佛在舍卫国，祇树给孤独园。

Thus have I heard (As it is what I heard): Once Buddha was in the land of Shravasti, in the garden of Jeta and Anathapindika.

如是，标信顺。我闻，标师承。一时，标机感。佛，标教主。舍卫等，标说经处也。

This section opens the assembly where the Pure Land doctrine was taught. They are the words of Ananda [the Buddha's personal assistant], who recorded the sutra.

"As it is" means it is what Ananda believed to be truly recorded. "What I heard" expresses what he received from the teacher. "Once" describes the moment the teaching was given. "Buddha" is the supreme dharma teacher. "The Garden of Jeta and Anathapindika in the land of Shravasti" is the place where Buddha preached this sutra.

实相妙理，古今不变，名如。依实相理，念佛求生净土，决定无非曰是。

实相非我非无我，阿难不坏假名，故仍称我。耳根发耳识，亲聆圆音，如空印空，名闻。时无实法，以师资道合，说听周足，名一时。

The essence of the Absolute Reality has never been changed from ancient times to modern, thus called "as". For we recite the Buddha--name to seek birth in the Pure Land basing ourselves upon the inner truth of absolute reality, we will definitely not go wrong, thus called "it is".

Absolute reality is not self and it is not no-self, Ananda, however, intentionally followed the ordinary name of "I" here, so he still says "I". Ananda's ears produced auditory consciousness, so he could personally hear the perfect voice [of Sakyamuni Buddha preaching this sutra] -- this was like emptiness printing emptiness. It is in this sense that Ananda "heard" the sutra.

"Once Buddha was in Shravasti" the sutra continues. Time has no absolute meaning. "Once" means at the time when the teacher and students have joined, and a full sharing of preaching and listening is taking place.

自觉觉他，觉行圆满，人天大师，名佛。

"Buddha" is the name for one who has been enlightened and who brings enlightenment to others, whose enlightened practice is complete and functions as the great teacher of all humans and gods (devas).

舍卫，此云闻物，中印度大国之名，波斯匿王所都也。匿王太子名只陀，此云战胜。匿王大臣名须达多，此云给孤独。给孤长者布金买太子园，供佛及僧。只陀感叹，施余未布少地。故并名祇树给孤独园也。

The place name "Shravasti" in Sanskrit means "hearing things". It was the name of a great kingdom in India, and also of its main city, the capital of King Prasenajit [during the time of Sakyamuni Buddha]. The King's Crown Prince was called Jeta, which means

"Victorious in Battle". A senior minister of the king, Sudatta, was also called Anathapindika which means "Benefactor of Widows and Orphans". Anathapindika paid for Prince Jeta's garden in gold, and donated it to Buddha and his monks. Prince Jeta was very moved, and donated the trees and another parcel of land. Thus the double name [for the site where Buddha preached the sutra]: "the Garden of Jeta and Anathapindika".

(丙) 二引大众同闻三：初声闻众、二菩萨众、三天人众。

声闻居首者，出世相故，常随从故，佛法赖僧传故。菩萨居中者，相不定故，不常随故，表中道义故。天人列后者，世间相故，凡圣品杂故，外护职故。

Next the sutra describes the assembly [who came to hear Buddha preach]. There were three groups: first, the group of **monastic disciples (Arhats)**, second, the group of Bodhisattvas, and third, the congregation of humans and gods.

Why are the monastic disciples put first? Because they had left behind worldly forms, because they always accompanied the Buddha, and because the Buddha Dharma depends on monks and nuns to spread it.

Why are the Bodhisattvas placed in the middle? Because their forms are not fixed, because they do not always accompany the Buddha, and also in order to suggest the idea of the Middle Path.

Why are the humans and gods placed last? Because they have worldly form, because they were a mixed lot, including both ordinary people and sages, and because their role is to protect the Buddha dharma from the outside.

(丁) 初声闻众又三：初明类标数、二表位叹德、三列上首名。(戊) 今初。

There are three aspects to the description of the group of monastic disciples: first, an account of their quality and number; second, praise for their high standing and their virtues; and third, a list of the names of the foremost among them. [The sutra reads:]

与大比丘僧，千二百五十人俱。

He was accompanied by twelve hundred and fifty great bhikshus.

大比丘，受具足戒出家人也。比丘梵语，含三义：一、乞士，一钵资身，无所蓄藏，专求出要；二、破恶，正慧观察，破烦恼恶，不堕爱见；三、怖魔，发心受戒，羯磨成就，魔即怖也。

"Bhikshu" is a Sanskrit term to present a Mahayana Buddhist monk taking complete disciplines with a triple meaning.

First, "bhikshu" means a mendicant, someone who has just a single bowl to support his living, and accumulates nothing, and intently asking for Buddhist Dharma.

Second, "bhikshu" means someone who has broken through evil, someone who observes everything with correct wisdom, someone who has smashed the evil of sensory afflictions, and does not fall into illusionary views and thoughts.

Third, "bhikshu" means someone who scares devils, who has accepted the full set of 250 disciplinary precepts, who has acquired achievement by assemblies of monks for the confession of sins and absolution. Thus, devils are afraid of them.

僧者，具云僧伽，此翻和合众。同证无为解脱，名理和。身同住，口无诤，意同悦，见同解，戒同修，利同均，名事和也。

The word for the monastic community as a whole, "Sangha", means a harmonious association. This harmony at the level of inner truth means sharing the realization of the truth of uncontrived liberation. At the phenomenal level, harmony means dwelling together without rancorous speech, with the same joyful intent, and the same understanding, sharing the same precepts and sharing material goods equally.

千二百五十人者，三迦叶师资共千人，身子、目连师资二百人，耶舍子等五十人。皆佛成道，先得度脱，感佛深恩，常随从也。

The sutra speaks of twelve hundred and fifty bhikshus. The three brothers Kashyapa had together a thousand disciples, Sariputra and Maudgalyayana had two hundred and Yasha had fifty. These were all people who had become Buddha's disciples shortly after his enlightenment, people who felt deep gratitude for Buddha's benevolence, and always followed him everywhere.

[The sutra continues:]

(戊) 二表位叹德

皆是大阿罗汉，众所知识。

...all of them great Arhats, well known to the assembly

阿罗汉亦含三义：一、**应供**，即乞士果；二、**杀贼**，即破恶果；三、**无生**，即怖魔果。

The word 'Arhat' also has three meanings. First, it means one who is worthy of offerings, as the result of being a mendicant [when he was a bhikshu]. Second it means a **slayer** of evil, as the result of having broken through evil. Third, it means one who will not be reborn in the cycle of life and death, as the result of destroying **delusion and afflictions**.

复有**慧解脱**、**俱解脱**、**无疑解脱**三种不同，今是无疑解脱，故名**大**。又本是法身大士，示作声闻，证此净土不思议法，故名**大**也。从佛转轮，广利人天，故为**众所知识**。

It also means one who is liberated with wisdom, one who is liberated with both wisdom and meditation, one who is liberated without any doubt. Because they reach the liberation without any doubt, thus they are named “**great**”. Furthermore, all these great Arhats are actually members of great Bodhisattvas, who appear as **monastic disciples** of the Buddha. They have realized the inconceivable reality of this Pure Land teaching, and so they are called “**great**”. They accompanied the Buddha as he turned the Wheel of the Dharma, bringing benefits to humans and gods on a vast scale, and so they were “**well known to the assembly**”.

Now the sutra lists the names of the leaders of the Arhats:

(戊) 三列上首名

长老舍利弗、摩诃目犍连、摩诃迦叶、摩诃迦旃延、摩诃俱絺罗、离婆多、周利槃陀伽、难陀、阿难陀、罗侯罗、憍梵波提、宾头卢颇罗堕、迦留陀夷、摩诃劫宾那、薄拘罗、**阿晃(音 nou)楼驮(阿那律)**，如是等诸大弟子。

Among them were his leading disciples, such figures as the Elders Sariputra, Maudgalyayana, Mahakasyapa, Mahakatyayana, and Mahakausthila, Revata, Suddhipanthaka, Nanda, Ananda, Rahula, Gavampati, Pindola-bharadvaja, Kalodayin, Mahakapphina, Vakula, and Aniruddha, etc., all great disciples.

[**长老舍利弗、摩诃目犍连、摩诃迦叶**]

德腊俱尊，故名长老。身子尊者声闻众中，**智慧**第一。目连尊者**神通**第一。饮光尊者身有金光，传佛心印为初祖，**头陀行**第一。

"Elder" is the term given to those who are honored both for their virtue and their long years as monks.

Among the Buddha's monastic disciples, the Venerable Sariputra was the foremost in wisdom and the Venerable Maudgalyayana was foremost in supernatural powers.

The Venerable Mahakasyapa's body shined with a golden light: he transmitted the Buddha's Mind Seal and became the first patriarch [of the Zen tradition]. He was foremost among the Buddha's monastic disciples in **ascetic practices**.

[摩诃迦旃延、摩诃俱絺罗、离婆多、周利槃陀伽]

文饰尊者婆罗门种，**论议**第一。大膝尊者答问第一。星宿尊者**无倒乱**第一。继道尊者因根钝仅持一偈，**辩才**无尽，**义持**第一。

The Venerable Mahakatyayana was of a Brahmanical lineage, and was foremost in argumentation.

The Venerable Mahakausthila was foremost in question-and-answer dialogue.

The Venerable Revata was the foremost in meditation free of error and confusion.

The Venerable Suddhipanthaka had been dull by nature but through memorizing two words of the sutras [sweep clean, i.e., sweep the mind clean], his eloquence became limitless and he was the foremost in upholding the truth of Real Mark.

[难陀、阿难陀、罗侯罗]

喜尊者佛之亲弟，**仪容**第一。庆喜尊者佛之堂弟，复为侍者，**多闻**第一。覆障尊者佛之太子，**密行**第一。

The Venerable Nanda (Sundarananda) was Buddha's own younger brother, and was foremost in formal comportment.

The Venerable Ananda was Buddha's cousin, and served as his personal attendant: he was the most learned [and always committed the Buddha's spoken teachings to memory].

The Venerable Rahula was Buddha's son and heir [from the time when he was a royal prince], and he was the foremost in adherence to every subtle precept and never advertising his cultivation.

[微细护持戒行。亦三千威仪、八万细行等，悉能持守无缺。如罗睺罗，以持戒严净而为佛弟子中密行第一。然依台宗密行有大小乘之别，微细护持为密行属小乘；若据法华，罗睺罗原为法身菩萨，住于圆顿妙戒，然今现声闻身，持小乘粗戒而隐密本地妙戒，故称密行。]

[憍梵波提、宾头卢颇罗堕、迦留陀夷]

牛司尊者宿世恶口，感此余报，受天供养第一。不动尊者久住世间，应末世供，福田第一。黑光尊者为佛使者，教化第一。

The Venerable Gavampati had spoken evil in past lives, and was affected by the karmic retribution for this [by having a voice like a snorting ox]: he was foremost in receiving the offerings of the gods.

The Venerable Pindola-bharadvaja had broken the rule against displaying spiritual powers and was told to remain in this world for a long time. He was foremost as a field of blessings for sentient beings.

The Venerable Kalodayin was Buddha's emissary, and he was foremost in spreading the teaching.

[摩诃劫宾那、薄拘罗、阿冕(音 nou)楼驮(阿那律)，如是等诸大弟子。]

房宿尊者知星宿第一。善容尊者寿命第一。无贫尊者亦佛堂弟，天眼第一。

The Venerable Mahakapphina was the foremost in his knowledge of the stars.

The Venerable Vakula was the most long-lived of Buddha's monastic disciples.

The Venerable Aniruddha was another of Buddha's cousins, and he was foremost in the magical ability of his celestial eyes.

[十弟子：一、舍利弗，智慧第一。二、目犍连，神通第一。三、摩诃迦叶，头陀第一。四、阿那律，天眼第一。五、须菩提，解空第一。六、富楼那，说法第一。七、迦旃延，论义第一。八、优婆离，持律第一。九、罗睺罗，密行第一。十、阿难陀，多闻第一。]

此等常随众，本法身大士，示作声闻，为影响众。今闻净土摄受功德，得第一义悉檀之益，增道损生，自净佛土，复名当机众矣。

Fundamentally, all these constant companions of the Buddha were members of Dharmakaya Bodhisattvas, who just manifested themselves as monastic disciples of the Buddha to benefit the Buddha's teaching.

Now they are to hear of the all-encompassing merits of the Pure Land, and gain the benefits of the teaching of the supreme truth, so they can learn Buddha dharma more and reduce their delusions, and purify their own Buddha land in their mind. Thus they are called an appropriate audience for the occasion.

Now the sutra describes the group of Bodhisattvas in the assembly:

【四悉檀】

智度论说，四悉檀总摄一切十二部经、八万四千法藏。四是四个方法，悉是普遍之义，檀是梵语檀那之简称，亦即布施之义。佛以四法普施众生，以令一切众生完成佛道，叫做“四悉檀”。

- 一、世界悉檀，佛开始时，先顺世界之凡情，宣说浅近之事理，以令闻者欢喜和信受；
- 二、各各为人悉檀，佛审察众生的根机，及程度之浅深，而说各人所需要之法，令众生发起正信，增长善根；
- 三、对治悉檀，对嗔多者教以慈悲观，痴多者教以因缘观，障多者教以念佛观，如是普施种种之法药，以去除众生的恶病；
- 四、**第一义悉檀**，佛见众生的机缘既熟，便为之说诸法实相，以令众生一起悟入圣者之道。

（丁）二菩萨众

并诸菩萨摩诃萨，文殊师利法王子、阿逸多菩萨、乾陀诃提菩萨、常精进菩萨，与如是等诸大菩萨。

Also present were the Bodhisattvas Mahasattva: **Manjusri**, Prince of the Dharma, the Bodhisattva Ajita (the Invincible), and the Bodhisattva Gandhahastin, and Bodhisattva Nityodyukta (Constant Progress), and other such great enlightening beings.

菩萨摩诃萨，此云大道心，成就有情。乃**悲智**双运，自他兼利之称。

“Bodhisattva-mahasattva” means a great enlightening being, pursuing great Buddha Dharma, and liberating all sentient beings. Their **compassion and wisdom** are operating in tandem to benefit both self and others.

佛为法王，文殊绍佛家业，名**法王子**，菩萨众中，智慧第一。非勇猛实智，不能证解净土法门，故居初。

Buddha is the King of the Dharma. Manjusri continued the vocation of teaching Dharma, so he is called the Prince of the Dharma. Among the assembly of Bodhisattvas, he is foremost in wisdom. Without fearless genuine wisdom, you cannot truly understand the Pure Land teaching, and so Manjusri is put first [in the assembly of Bodhisattvas hearing the Amitabha Sutra].

弥勒当来成佛，现居**等觉**，以究竟严净佛国为要务，故次列。

The Bodhisattva Ajita is Maitreya. In the future he will become a Buddha, but now he is at the highest stage of the Bodhisattvahood, Equal Enlightenment. Because he regards what the most important thing is doing the ultimate sublime and purification of Buddha land, he is listed as the second.

不休息者，旷劫修行不暂停故。常精进者，自利利他无疲倦故。

Next the sutra lists the Bodhisattvas Gandhahastin, the one who does not rest, cultivating practice for eons without ever stopping, and Bodhisattva Nityodyukta, the one who is making constant progress, tirelessly benefiting self and others.

此等深位菩萨，必皆求生净土，以不离见佛，不离闻法，不离亲近供养众僧，乃能速疾圆满菩提故。

These Bodhisattvas of high rank must all seek birth in the Pure Land, so that they will not be separated from seeing the Buddha and hearing the Dharma and giving offerings in person to the Sangha, in order that they may quickly achieve Supreme Enlightenment

(丁) 三天人众

及释提桓因等，无量诸天大众俱。

Also present was Śakra devānām Indra, the king of the gods, along with countless numbers of heavenly beings, making up a great assembly.

释提桓因，此云能为主，即忉利天王。等者，下等四王，上等夜摩、兜率、化乐、他化，色、无色无量诸天也。

大众俱，谓十方天人八部修罗人非人等无与会，无非净土法门所摄之机也。通序竟。

The name "Śakra devānām Indra" means Sakra: able, devanam: heaven and Indra: king; he is the king of the **Trayastrimsa** Heaven, the Heaven of Thirty-Three. Below his heaven is the Heaven of the Four Deva-Kings. Above are the Heaven of Yama, the Tusita Heaven, the Nirmanarati Heaven, the Paranirmita Heaven, the heavens of forms, the formless heavens, and innumerable other heavens.

"Making up a great assembly" means that there were also other gods, **asuras**, and other non-human beings from all the worlds of the ten directions in attendance [to hear Buddha give forth the Amitabha Sutra], and that all had the potential to benefit from the Pure Land teaching.

Thus ends the general introduction to the sutra. Next the particular introduction comes.

(乙) 二别序。发起序也。

净土妙门，不可思议，无人能问，佛自唱依正名字为发起。又佛智鉴机无谬，见此大众应闻净土妙门而获**四益**，故不俟问，便自发起。如《梵网》下卷自唱位号云我今卢舍那等，智者判作发起序，例可知也。

The wondrous gate of the Pure Land is inconceivable, and no one was able to ask about it, so Buddha took it upon himself to begin by extolling the names of its Buddha and place. Moreover, given that the Buddha's wisdom is able to evaluate the potentials of sentient beings unerringly, he saw that this great assembly ought to hear about the wondrous gate of the Pure Land so they could gain benefits. Therefore, he did not wait for questions, but began by himself. A similar example can be found in the latter part of The Sutra of Brahma's Net, which is also classified with the similar meaning by Master Zhizhe.

尔时佛告长老舍利弗：从是西方，过十万亿佛土，有世界名曰极乐。其土有佛，号阿弥陀，今现在说法。

At that time Buddha said to the Elder Sariputra: "West of here, past a hundred billion Buddha-lands, there exists a world called "Ultimate Bliss". In this land there exists a Buddha called Amitabha, who is expounding the Dharma right now.

净土法门，三根普摄，绝待圆融，不可思议。圆收圆超一切法门，甚深难信。故特告大智慧者，非第一智慧，不能直下无疑也。

The Pure Land Dharma gate takes in all people, whether they are of low, medium, or high capacity. It is beyond all relativities, in perfect fusion. It is inconceivable: it is perfectly all-encompassing, and goes completely beyond all other Buddhist methods. It is very profound and hard to believe in. Therefore it is specially announced to those of great wisdom: without the highest level of wisdom, you cannot arrive directly at the stage where you have no doubts about the Pure Land teaching.

西方者，横亘直西，标示现处也。**十万亿者，千万曰亿，今积亿至十万也。**佛土者，三千大千世界，通为一佛所化。且以此土言之，一须弥山，东西南北各一洲，同一日月所照，一铁围山所绕，名一四天下。千四天下名小千世界，千小千名中千世界，千中千名**大千世界**。过如此佛土十万亿之西，是极乐世界也。

"West" signifies the place where the Pure Land appears, which is west of here. A "Buddha-land" is a whole great galaxy of worlds that are all taught by one Buddha. In terms of our world, there is a central polar mountain (axis), and four continents to the east, west, south, and north of it, illuminated by the same sun and moon, surrounded by a circular range of iron mountains: this is one world. A thousand of these makes a small world system, a thousand small world-systems makes a medium world system, and a thousand medium world-systems makes a great galaxy of worlds. West of a hundred billion of such Buddha-lands is the Land of Ultimate Bliss.

问：何故极乐在西方？答：此非善问。假使极乐在东，汝又问何故在东，岂非戏论。况自十一万亿佛土视之，又在东矣，何足致疑。

Question: Why is the Land of Ultimate Bliss in the west?

Answer: This is not a good question. If the Land of Ultimate Bliss were in the east, you would be asking why it is in the east. Isn't this just playing with words? What's more, if you look at the Land of Ultimate Bliss from the point of view of the hundred and one billionth Buddha land, it is in the east. What is worth creating doubts about?

有世界名曰极乐，序依报国土之名也。竖约三际以辨时劫，横约十方以定疆隅，故称世界。极乐者，梵语须摩提，亦云安养、安乐、清泰等，乃永离众苦第一安隐之谓，如下广释。

"There exists a world called Ultimate Bliss." This introduces us to the name of Amitabha's environment, to his domain. In the temporal dimension, its time is reckoned in terms of past, present, and future. In the spatial dimension, its boundaries are reckoned in terms of the ten directions [the four cardinal directions, the four intermediate directions, the nadir and the zenith].

The Sanskrit name for the Land of Ultimate Bliss is "Sukhavati". It is also called the Land of Peaceful Nurturing, the Land of Peace and Bliss, the Land of Pure Equanimity, and so on. The basic meaning is that it is utterly peaceful and secure, and forever removed from all forms of pain and suffering. This is explained at length below.

然佛土有四，各分净秽。凡圣同居土，五浊重者秽，五浊轻者净。方便有余土，析空拙度证入者秽，体空巧度证入者净。实报无障碍土，次第三观证入者秽，一心三观证入者净。常寂光土，分证者秽，究竟满证者净。今云极乐世界，正指同居净土，亦即横具上三净土也。

There are four kinds of Buddha Land, and each category is in turn subdivided in terms of purity or defilement.

In the Land Where Saints and Ordinary Beings Dwell Together, those who are with heavier five turbidities are polluted, and those who are with lighter five turbidities are

clean. **In the Land of Expedient Liberation with Incompleteness**, those who are born here by analyzing void are impure and those who are born here by directly entering void are pure. **In the Land of Real Reward**, those who enter it through sequence of three contemplations are impure and those who enter it with one mind of unified three contemplations are pure. **In the Land of Eternally Quiescent Light**, those who have reached the land without completely breaking all ignorance delusions are impure, and those who have broken all delusions are pure. In the scripture, the Ultimate Bliss World is referred to the Land Where Saints and Ordinary Beings Dwell Together, and encompasses all the other three lands as well.

[三观是台宗之重要法门，即空观、假观、中观称“空假中三观”。依据‘菩萨璎珞本业经’卷上，贤圣学观品“从假入空二谛观、从空入假平等观、中道第一义谛观”而立为旨趣。

1.空观：又云从假入空观。空是离性离相义。观一念之心，不在内、不在外、不在中间，称为空；由观一念空故而一空一切空，无假无中而不空；此因空、假、中三观能荡除三惑，以空观荡除见思，以假观荡除尘沙，以中观荡除无明，即毕竟空为空观。换言之：自世俗常识(假)进入宗教认识真理(空)为空观。

2.假观：又云从空入假观。假是无法不备义。观一念心具足一切诸法称为假；即由观一念假，而一假一切假，无空无中而不假；此因空、假、中三观皆能立法，以空观立真谛法，以假观立俗谛法，以中观立中谛法，三法皆立为妙假观。换言之，不留滞于空而进入佛智遍照之世俗境界为假观。

3.中观：又云中道第一义谛观。中即中正、泯绝二边之对待。观一念心，非空非假，即空即假，称为中；由观一念中而一中一切中，无空无假而不中；此空、假、中三观皆能泯绝对待，言空则空外无法，言假则假外无法，言中则中外无法，三者皆绝待为圆中观。简言之，不执空观、不执假观，以空假圆融之大悲菩萨行，为中道观。

1.别相三观：即历别观于三谛。若从假入空(空观)，仅得观真谛；若从空入假(假观)仅得观俗谛；若入中道正观，方得双照真、俗二谛。此别教之三观。别教认为三观尽不相同，且为依序渐观，故又称**次第三观**、隔历三观。依次可断除三惑而得三智之妙论。

2.一心三观：即一念心中而能圆观三谛。观一念心毕竟无，净若虚空为空观；能观之心、所观之境皆历历分明为假观；虽历历分明，然性常自空，空不定于空，假不定于假为中观！即三而一，即一而三，是为**一心三观**。]

有佛号阿弥陀，序正报教主之名也，翻译如下广释。佛有三身，各论单复。法身单，指所证理性。报身单，指能证功德智慧。化身单，指所现相好色像。

法身复者，自性清净法身，离垢妙极法身。报身复者，自受用报身，他受用报身。化身复者，示生化身，应现化身。又佛界化身，随类化身。

The Buddha's name is Amitabha for introducing the name of the Teaching Host in the land. Buddhas have three bodies, which are discussed in terms of singularity and multiplicity. The singular term of **Dharma Body** means the realized trueness. The singular term of **Reward Body** means the virtue and wisdom that can realize. The singular term of **Response Body** means the excellent manifested appearance and image.

The plural term of Dharma Body means the self inner pure nature that every sentient being possesses and the Dharma nature that every Buddha has realized. The plural term of Reward Body means rewarded body benefiting self and rewarded body benefiting others. The plural term of Response Body means the body shows birth and death, the body responded to people's requests, the body in the Buddha realm, and the body following various forms in the worlds.

虽辨单复三身，实非一非三，而三而一。不纵横，不并别，离过绝非，不可思议。今云阿弥陀佛，正指同居土中示生化身，仍复即报即法也。

Though there are singular, plural terms and the names of three bodies, they are actually not one, not three, and they are three and one as well. No conjunction, no differentiation, no discrimination, no forms, no words that can describe. It is inconceivable. The Amitabha that is said in the sutra is referred to the Response Body appeared in the Land Where Saints and Ordinary Beings Dwell Together; as explained previously, the body can also be regarded as the Reward Body and the Dharma Body.

[法身、报身、应身。法身又名自性身，或法性身，即常住不灭，人人本具的真性，不过我们众生迷而不显，佛是觉而证得了；报身是由佛的智慧功德所成的，有自受用报身和他受用报身的分别，自受用报身是佛自己受用内证法乐之身，他受用报身是佛为十地菩萨说法而变现的身；应身又名应化身，或变化身，即应众生之机缘而变现出来的佛身。]

【沙：我们自己的法身、报身在哪里？即使是如此的迷茫，还是要勇敢的承担。】，

复次世界及佛皆言有者，具四义：的标实境，令欣求故；诚语指示，令专一故；简非干城阳焰，非权现曲示，非缘影虚妄，非保真偏但，破魔邪权小故；圆彰性具，令深证故。

When the sutra says "**there exists a world called Ultimate Bliss**" and "**there exists a Buddha called Amitabha,**" it is saying that both that world and that Buddha do actually exist. There are four meanings here.

1. It indicates that there is a real Pure Land, and make us joyfully seek it.
2. It gives us truthful instructions, to make us concentrate on the practice of Pure-Land teaching.
3. It states that the Pure Land is not a figment of the imagination or a mirage, that it is not a provisional manifestation or just a roundabout teaching for attracting people with low capacity, that it is not an empty falsity, and that it is not a land reached via the Hinayana vehicle.
4. It demonstrates that the Pure Land is part of our true nature, to enable us to have a profound realization that Amitabha is our self nature; and Pure Land is our own mind.

[对于小乘之涅槃而云大乘至极之涅槃为第一义空。小乘之涅槃者偏真但空也，大乘之涅槃者空亦空，为中道实相之空，故名第一义。三藏法数四十六曰：“诸法中最第一法名为涅槃，涅

槃之法空无有相，是为第一义空。”涅槃经二十七曰：“佛性名第一义空，第一义空名为智慧，所言空者不见空与不空。”]

今现在说法者，简上依正二有，非过去已灭，未来未成，正应发愿往生，亲觐听法，速成正觉也。

"Expounding the Dharma right now" shows that both the Pure Land and Amitabha exist -- this is not a case of "the past is already gone, and the future has not yet taken shape." We must make a vow to be born in the Pure Land, and to personally hear Amitabha's teaching, so that we may quickly achieve true enlightenment.

复次二有现在，劝信序也；世界名极乐，劝愿序也；佛号阿弥陀，劝持名妙行序也。

The fact that the Pure Land and Amitabha Buddha are here in the present encourages us to have faith. The fact that Amitabha's world is called the Land of Ultimate Bliss encourages us to vow to be born there. The fact that the Buddha in the Pure Land is called Amitabha encourages us to engage in the wondrous practice of invoking his name.

复次阿弥序佛，说法序法，现在海会序僧。佛法僧同一实相，

Furthermore, Amitabha introduces Buddha, "expounding Dharma" introduces Dharma and the present assembly introduces Sangha. The words of the sutra are concise, but the meaning is very profound. "Buddha, Dharma and Sangha" are holding the same Absolute Reality:

序体；从此起信愿行，序宗；信愿行成，必得往生见佛闻法。序用；唯一佛界为所缘境，不杂余事。序教相也，言略意周矣。初序分竟。

The introduction portion introduces the essence: give birth to faith, vow and practice. It introduces the principle: with the success of faith, vow and practice, people must be able to reach Pure Land to see the Amitabha and hear his teaching. It introduces application: the only thing to think about in every moment is the Pure Land, nothing else. It introduces the form of teaching: the words are concise, but the meaning is very profound.

This concludes the commentary on the introductory portion of the sutra.