

# Transference of Merit

By Brooks Hansard on March 10<sup>th</sup> 2013 in CTTB Buddha Hall  
Chinese Translation by Yihuan Shi

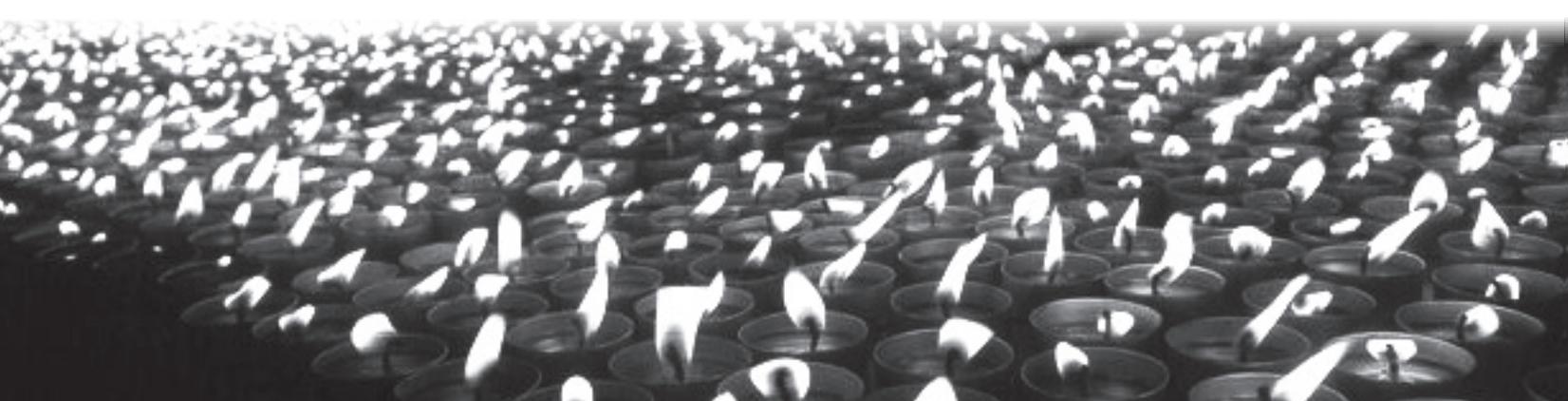
Good evening all good and wise advisors. Amitofo! This evening I would like to talk about an important part of the Mahayana Path, which is the transference of merit. Before going in to how the Mahayana Path utilizes the practice of transferring merit, I would first like to show how even at the beginning of the Buddha's teaching career, he was teaching about the benefits of transferring merit. In the Pali Canon, we find many instances where the Buddha taught about the efficacy of transferring merit. Due to lack of time, I can now only read just one such example. In this sutra, the Buddha teaches the laity how they can benefit their deceased relatives who have been reborn as hungry ghosts. He teaches them that they should give offerings to the Sangha and then dedicate its merit to their deceased relatives.

Now I'll quote the Buddha's teaching, which is written in verse and titled, Hungry Ghosts Outside the Walls:

各位善知識，大家晚安，阿彌陀佛。今晚我要探討的主題是：迴向功德。迴向功德是大乘佛法裏很重要的一環。在討論大乘佛法如何行使迴向功德前，我想先向大家介紹，早在佛陀開始其教化生涯前，他便教導人們如何做迴向功德。在巴利文的經典裏，我們發現在許多場合，佛陀會教導弟子們關於迴向的功德力。由於時間有限，我只能為大家讀誦一段實例。在這段經文裏，佛陀教育在家人如何為他們已逝並墮入餓鬼道的親人們祈福。佛陀教他們要供養僧眾，然後將功德迴向給這些去世的親眷。

我所引用的這段經文，是以偈頌的方式寫成，其標題為「牆外的餓鬼」：

牆外餓鬼眾，十字路躊躇，  
返顧舊家所，佇倚堂門口；  
滿席美饈饌，瓊漿玉飲濃，  
無人邀共饗，惡趣徒乾望。





# 迴向功德

韓親喜 講於2013年3月10日 萬佛城大殿  
石義環 中譯



*Outside the walls they stand, and at crossroads.  
At door posts they stand, returning to their old homes.  
But when a meal with plentiful food and drink is served,  
no one remembers them.*

*Such is the karma of living beings.  
Thus those who feel sympathy for their dead relatives  
give timely offerings of proper food and drink  
— exquisite, clean — thinking:  
“May this be for our relatives. May our relatives be happy!”*

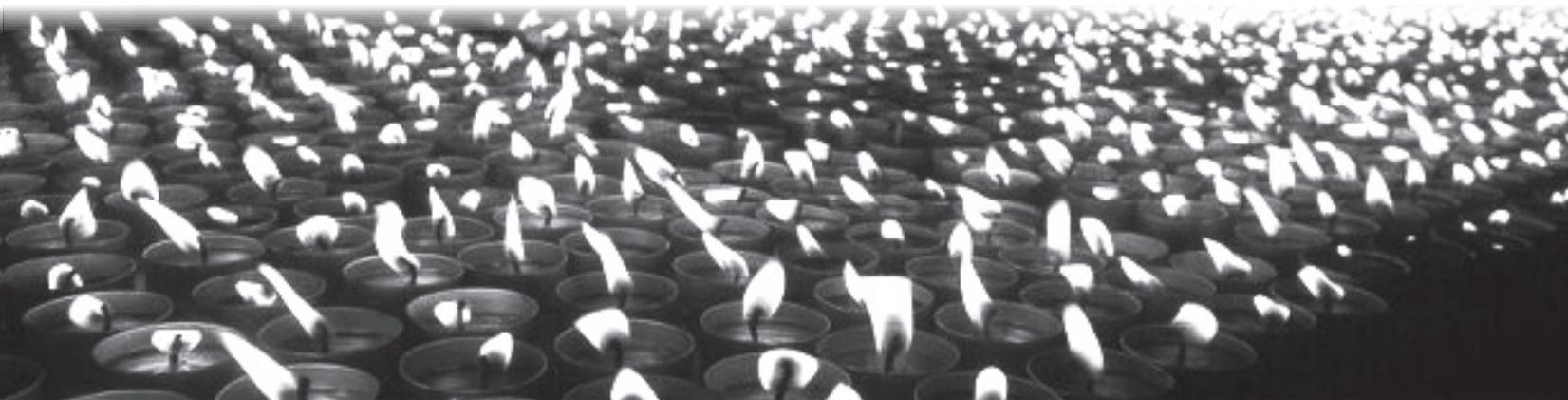
*And those who have gathered there, the assembled ghosts of the relatives,  
with appreciation give their blessing for the plentiful food and drink:  
“May our relatives live long,  
because of whom we have gained this gift.  
We have been honored,  
and the donors are not without reward!”*

此是業力然，此是餓鬼殤，  
生者起哀矜，傷逝故人往，  
應供僧妙食，並做如是觀；  
『我為汝供養，願汝永長安。』

集集餓鬼眾，受此心悅然，  
懷恩報榮寵，並做如是觀；  
『汝為我供養，我今已受享；  
願親眷壽長，汝必受報賞。』

餓鬼法界中，無有農耕事，  
無有趕牧忙，無有貿易商；  
亦無金錢往，嗚呼餓鬼眾，  
陽世緣已歿，唯賴眾垂祥。

譬如山巒雨，潺湲入幽谷，  
陽世人做福，庇蔭亡者路；



*For in their realm there's no farming,  
no herding of cattle, no commerce,  
no trading with money. They live on what is given here,  
hungry ghosts, whose time here is done.*

*As water raining on a hill, flows down to the valley,  
even so does what is given here benefit the dead.  
As rivers full of water fill the ocean full,  
even so does what is given here benefit the dead.*

*They think: "He gave to me, she acted on my behalf,  
they were my relatives, companions, friends"  
Offerings should be given for the dead,  
when one reflects thus on things done in the past.*

*For no weeping, no sorrowing,  
no other lamentation benefits the dead,  
whose relatives persist in that way.  
But when this offering is given, well-placed in the Sangha,  
it works for their long-term benefit,  
and they profit immediately.*

*In this way,  
the proper duty to relatives has been shown,  
great honor has been done to the dead,  
and monks have been given strength,  
The merit you've acquired isn't small.*

As can be seen from the above verse, the Buddha was teaching about transference of merit throughout his entire teaching career, including at the beginning. However, it's not until we get to the Mahayana sutras that we see a very big emphasis placed on the importance of transferring merit. Soon after the Buddha attained enlightenment, Universal Goodness Bodhisattva taught the assembly of Bodhisattvas that they should transfer merit, which is the 10th practice of his 10 Conducts and Vows. Regarding this, Universal Goodness Bodhisattva said:

"Good Man, to universally transfer all merit and virtue is explained like this: All of the merit and virtue, from the first vow, to worship and respect, up to and including the vow to constantly accord, I universally transfer to all beings throughout the Dharma Realm and to the limits of empty space. I vow that all beings will be constantly peaceful and happy, without sickness or suffering. I vow that no one will succeed in doing any evil, but that all will quickly perfect their cultivation of good karma. I vow to close the doors to the evil destinies and open the right paths of humans, gods, and Nirvana. I will stand in for beings and receive all the extremely severe fruits of suffering which they bring on with their evil karma. I will liberate all these beings and

譬如溪川滿，漾漾注海洋，  
陽世人做福，庇蔭亡者途。  
『親代我供養，眷為我酬償，  
他是我同行，她與我同甘。』  
餓鬼作此觀。

『一切所造福，皆為往者故。』  
生者作是觀。

家親與眷屬，情執深縛纏。  
勿使涕零零，勿使長戚戚，  
哀哀愁悴情，於死無增益。  
但使施僧伽，做諸莊嚴具，  
長遠受福慧，當下亦禪利。  
生者盡本份，勇健增色力，  
是故此行處，功德成就殊。

從剛才引用的這段偈頌，我們可以看到，佛陀在整個教化的歲月裏頭，包括最初的時候，都在教導眾生迴向功德。然而，直到大乘經典，迴向功德的重要性才被積極地強調及重視。佛陀證悟不久之後，普賢菩薩就告訴菩薩們應該修行迴向功德：在普賢十大願裏頭，關於第十行願，普賢菩薩是這麼說的：

「復次，善男子！言普皆迴向者，從初禮拜，乃至隨順，所有功德，皆悉迴向盡法界、虛空界一切眾生。願令眾生常得安樂，無諸病苦；欲行惡法，皆悉不成；所修善業，皆速成就；關閉一切諸惡趣門，開示人天涅槃正路。若諸眾生，因其積集諸惡業故，所感一切極重苦果，我皆代受；令彼眾生悉得解脫，究竟成就無上菩提，菩薩如是所修迴向。」

對我而言，觀察自己如何練習迴向，乃至日久功深，是一件頗有趣的事。還記得，第一次聽到身為大乘行者練習迴向功德的重要性時，我覺得有些驚扭，因為以前從來沒有做過。剛開始練習，我並不是打從心底去做，只是因為大乘的經教如此說。假使沒有這樣的教誨，我不會去做。

然而，一旦養成迴向的習慣後，我漸

ultimately bring them to accomplish Unsurpassed Bodhi. The Bodhisattva cultivates transference in this way.

As for myself, it's been interesting to observe how my practice of transference has gradually deepened over time. I remember when I first learned about how it's important for Mahayana practitioners to transfer merit. Never having done it before, it was a little awkward at first. At that time, I didn't do it because I really wanted to. I only did it because that's what the Mahayana teachings instructed me to do. If I hadn't been instructed to do it, I wouldn't have done it otherwise.

Once I started to get into the habit of transferring merit, it started to feel more natural to me. However, even though by that time I was doing it based upon my own initiative and desire, my heart would often still not be sincere while doing it. Only occasionally while transferring merit would I really be concerned about sharing the merit and blessings with other beings. Perhaps I would recite the transference of merit with my mouth, but not truly mean it with my heart. We could call that "paying lip service" to transference. However, transference occurs through the mind, not through the mouth. As we all know, it's very important that we transfer with our hearts in order for a truly efficacious response to occur. What we recite with our mouths is meant to act as a support to remind us that we are transferring merit at that particular moment. If we aren't doing it with our heart, then what's the point?

So eventually I realized I was wasting my time whenever I didn't truly mean it and that I should start being more serious and sincere when transferring. I've noticed that when I'm sincere during transference, I feel deep compassion and joy in my heart as I think of how all the suffering beings in the world will be able to enjoy the light of blessings and wisdom that I just created through my practice and good deed, and which I'm sharing with them. I think if you experience compassion and joy while transferring, then you can know your transference is true, and you can feel confident that it will be efficacious.

It helps one to be sincere when one understands why it is exactly that we must transfer merit. I never really understood that until I read one of Nagarjuna's shastras, *the Bodhisambhara Shastra*, which includes Bhikshu Vashita's commentary. In his shastra, he makes it very clear why we must transfer merit. I will read his verses along with the commentary. Here are the verses:

*With but a lesser accumulation of merit ,  
One remains unable to realize Bodhi.  
Only by collecting merit more massive than a hundred Sumerus,  
Can one succeed in achieving that realization.*

*Although one may perform but a minor meritorious deed,  
Even in this, one possesses a skillful means.  
Taking the sphere of "all beings" as the object,  
One should generate a mental transformation of the conditions.*

漸就變得自然許多。不過，即使有時自己主動想迴向他人，其實內心還不夠真誠；我只有偶爾真心且認真地想和眾生分享我修行的功德。或許可以稱這種方式為「口頭禪迴向」，也就是口頭上迴向功德，但是心裏卻不這麼想，有點有口無心的意味。但是，迴向應該從我們的真心出發，不是光在嘴皮上念念罷了。我們都知道，要有感應，必須以懇切心迴向。口頭上的念誦，是幫助提醒我們當下正在迴向。假如我們假情假意地做，又有何意義呢？

多次練習之後，我終於發現假如不是真心地做迴向，我其實是在浪費自己的時間；而且也意識到修習迴向時，我需要更強的專注力，更加地誠心誠意。當我誠心地迴向，並且想到苦難的眾生可以分享到我修行的福報和智慧時，我的內心感到深深的慈悲和喜悅。假使在迴向時能感受到慈悲和喜悅，那麼你就知道這個迴向是真誠的，而且可以肯定這個迴向會非常有效。

當一個人懂得為什麼一定要迴向的究竟道理，便會比較真誠地迴向功德。以前我並沒有深刻的理解，直到我讀到龍樹菩薩的《菩提資糧論》，以及自在比丘(Bhikshu Vasitva)的淺釋。在《菩提資糧論》裏頭，龍樹菩薩講得非常清楚，為什麼我們必須要迴向功德。接下來，我就把這個偈頌和自在比丘的解釋念一遍。偈頌是這麼寫的：

少少積聚福，不能得菩提；  
百須彌量福，聚勝乃能得。  
雖作小福德，此亦有方便；  
於諸眾生所，應悉起攀緣。  
我有諸動作，常為利眾生；  
如是等心行，誰能量其福。

接下來是自在比丘所做的注解。他說：

「菩提是一種智慧的成就，證得菩提，就是最終要達到無所不知，也就是正遍知；要擁有正遍知的能力，需要廣大如虛空的功德。這些功德需要積累到如同一百座須彌山高，才能夠證得菩提。但是，藉

*Where one reflects: "May whatever actions I undertake,  
Always be done for the welfare of beings."  
Who could measure the merit of he?  
Whose mental actions are of this sort?*

Now, here's Bhikshu Vashita's commentary to Nagarjuna's verses:

"Bodhi" refers to the realization of a level of wisdom corresponding in its extensiveness to omniscience. Such knowledge is as infinitely vast as space itself and as such, it requires an accumulation of merit greater than the mass of a hundred Mt. Sumerus for its realization. By using the skillful means of mentally dedicating the merit from even a minor good deed to the goal of bringing about the Bodhi of all beings, the bodhisattva is able to make that small amount of merit infinite in scope. Thus, even though the enlightenment he wishes to achieve is so vast, he will still be enabled by this skillful means to generate the massive amount of merit required for realization of Buddhahood.

As can be seen from the above quotes, without transferring our merit to the liberation of all sentient beings throughout the Dharma Realm, we would never be able to generate enough merit required for the realization of the Buddha's infinitely vast omniscient wisdom and his all-pervasive Dharma Body. Therefore, when we transform ourselves, we transform others, and when we transform others, we transform ourselves. That is to say, when we transform ourselves through practice, we can also transform others through transference, and when we transform others through transference, that transference can also transform ourselves.

In these difficult times, it's quite easy to find the inspiration to transfer one's merit. For me, when reading world news, or even just when interacting with people I know, I'm constantly reminded that there is so much pain, sorrow, and suffering that exists in the world. The people in this world must endure things such as loss of wealth and loved ones, disease, poverty, violence, fear, and confusion. On the other hand, when I reflect upon myself, I think of how I have so many blessings: living near and supporting a Sangha; having contact with and faith in the Mahayana and the Venerable Master's teachings; being able to practice and study the Buddha Dharma; being surrounded and inspired by wholesome friends; living in a safe area in a country that has no war; having food, water, and medicine available as needed; having clothing and shelter available; having parents who support me and love me deeply; the list can continue...

When I think of how I have so many blessings, and yet the world suffers so much, and when I think of how I'm only one person, whereas all other beings are infinite, I realize that it is only right that I, as one person, give my blessings and light to beings, who are infinite, in order to alleviate their pain and suffering. Such a practice of transferring merit can instill within us the virtues of compassion and giving. So it not only benefits infinite beings, but it also benefits our practice as we continue to walk the Bodhisattva Path.

In today's modern, scientific era, many people might doubt whether

著極巧妙的迴向功德，即使只是很小的善功德，也可以迴向所有眾生，並希望所有眾生都能夠成就無上菩提。如果菩薩能夠將他們微小的功德迴向到無量無邊的話，他就可以達到想要證得無上菩提所需要的功德，他也就能夠成就佛道。」

從以上這段引文我們知道，假如沒有迴向功德給法界所有的眾生，讓他們得到解脫的話，我們永遠沒有辦法積累讓我們成就佛道，達到正遍知，同時證得遍一切處法身所需要的功德。因此，當我們修行轉化自己的時候，我們也在轉化別人；當我們轉化別人的時候，我們也同時在轉化自己。也就是說，當我們透過修行來轉化自己的時候，我們同時也是可以藉由迴向來轉化別人；當我們通過迴向來轉化別人的時候，這個迴向的功德，同時也會轉化我們自己。

在如此一個艱難困苦的年代，我們很容易會被激勵來做迴向功德。以我為例，當我閱讀發生在世界上的新聞，或者跟認識的人交談，我常常提醒自己這個世界充滿了痛苦、悲傷和磨難。娑婆世界的人需要承受各種苦處：有的失去財富，有的失去親人，或者遭受疾病、貧窮、暴力、恐懼或者困惑。然而從另外一個角度反思，我深覺自己是個幸運兒：我住在道場附近並且護持僧團；信仰大乘佛法以及上人的教化；有能力修行並且學習佛法；身邊有許多好的同參道友；生活在一個沒有戰爭而且和平的地方；擁有所需的食物、水，以及藥物；有衣服，也有安身之處；有深愛我、支持我的父母。這張清單，一下子是舉列不完的。

當我想到自己如此的幸運，但是世間還有那麼多的苦難；當我想到自己只是一個人，而其他受難的眾生卻是無盡無邊，這便激勵我把福報和光明迴向給所有無盡的眾生，來幫助他們減輕苦難。這樣修習迴向，便培養我們慈悲喜捨的德行。修行迴向不僅利益到無量無邊的眾生，同時也讓自己在菩提道上繼續走下去。

現在是科學時代，許多人或許會質疑功德怎麼能迴向給別人。他們可能會問，善行的果報怎能得以和別人分享，特別是對方根本

it's possible to transfer one's merit to others. They might ask how it could be possible to take a wholesome deed and share its fruit with others, who themselves did not partake in creating that karma. In response to such a question, I think a good way to explain how transference of merit works is by comparing it to the internet. The internet is a global system of interconnected networks. Each individual network is connected to the entirety of all the other networks. Therefore, if one person had all the email addresses of everyone on the planet, he could very easily send out a mass email to everyone, because of the fact that his individual network is connected to all the other networks.

Just like the internet, at a deeper, unconscious level, we are all connected to each other. Each individual is connected to the entirety of all beings throughout the Dharma Realm. Therefore, transferring merit to all beings can be seen as similar to sending out a mass email to all the people on the planet. In the case of transferring merit, instead of sending out an email, we are sending out light, and rather than sending a mass email to all, we are sending out massive light to all. This can take place because we are all interconnected. Thus, when transferring, we should have faith that, at a deeper level, those beings are all receiving our light and that they will find benefit in their lives from having gained that light.

The sutras often talk about how the task of a Bodhisattva is to adorn the Buddha's lands. By sharing the light of our blessings, wisdom, and virtue with all beings in the Saha world, we ourselves are adorning Vairochana's Buddha land. Although we cannot see such adornments with our physical eyes, we should have faith that it is occurring on a level that's beyond our perception. Thus, when we transfer merit, we are both repaying the kindness of the Buddhas above and also benefitting the beings below. For that reason, we should do it constantly and with true sincerity. If we do, we can be certain there will be an efficacious response. Amitofo! ❀

沒有在「業因」上參與創造。我想以全球網絡為例，來回應這些問題。網路是全球相通，每個人的網絡都和他人相通。因此，假如一個人擁有這個地球上所有人的電郵地址，他可以發信給每個人，因為我們的網絡都是互聯的。

如同網絡，在更深層次的淺意識裏，我們彼此都是相互聯繫；每一個眾生，和盡虛空遍法界的眾生都緊緊相連著。因此，迴向就好像發電子郵件給這個地球上所有的眾生。迴向，不僅是寄發郵件，我們寄發的是光明；迴向，不僅是發信給無量眾生，我們發出無量的光明照耀眾生。迴向行得通，因為我們每個人都相互聯繫著。因此，當我們迴向的時候，我們要有信心，要相信在更深層次的關係裏，眾生都可以接受到我們的光明，他們一定可以透過這些光明而得到助益。

佛經中，常常提到菩薩的責任是莊嚴佛土。通過和娑婆世界眾生分享我們的福報、光明、智慧、德行，我們也在莊嚴華藏世界。雖然肉眼看不到眾妙莊嚴，但是我們應該要有信心，它們確實存在於一個我們無法感觸的法界。因此當我們迴向時，也就是上報佛恩，下濟眾生。只要能以真誠心不斷迴向，終會得到善好的感應。阿彌陀佛！ ❀



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