



Following our Habits, Karma and Thoughts Before Death

萬佛聖城方丈和尚恒律法師

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A Dharma Talk by Abbot Heng Lyu in CTTB's Buddha Hall on December 30, 2017

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時間過得很快，再過一天，2017年就要進入歷史的塵埃之中；而新的一年，2018年，很快就會來臨。使人不禁聯想，這一生也會很快就過去了，那麼來生會在哪裡呢？

關於這個問題，我們先來看釋迦牟尼佛如何回答。有一次佛陀回到他的故鄉，迦毗羅衛城。佛陀的堂弟摩訶男來禮見佛陀，並且請問佛陀：「世尊，我每天在迦毗羅衛城這個熱鬧的城市進進出出，經常有橫衝直撞的人和車輛擦身而過。我時常在想，哪一天要是被這些行人、車輛乃至象、馬動物給撞死，臨死之前，我很可能會倉皇地忘失念佛、念法、念僧的正念。我很擔心這樣下輩子會淪落到哪一個地方呢？」

佛陀告訴摩訶男：「你不用擔心害怕，你死了之後會出生到一個很好的地方，不會淪落

Time flies, 2017 is going to end and become history very soon. 2018 is coming. It reminds us that our life will also pass very soon. What will happen after our life ends, where will we be in the future?

Let us see how the Buddha answered this question. On one occasion the Buddha was staying at Kapilavastu and his cousin Mahānāma went to the Buddha and said, "World Honoured One, Kapilavastu is rich and prosperous, populous and crowded. Sometimes when I have entered Kapilavastu, I had met up with runaway elephants and runaway horses, runaway chariots and runaway carts and runaway persons. At times like that my mindfulness with regard to the Buddha becomes muddled, my mindfulness with regard to the Dharma and the Sangha gets muddled. If I were to die at this moment, what would be my future destination?"

The Buddha said, "Have no fear Mahānāma, have no fear. Your death will not be a bad one; you will be reborn in a good place. Suppose a tree is leaning towards the east, slanting towards the east and inclining towards the east. When its roots are cut, which way will it fall?"

Mahānāma replied, "In whichever way it was leaning, slanting and inclining, World Honored One." "Mahānāma, you are the same." The Buddha

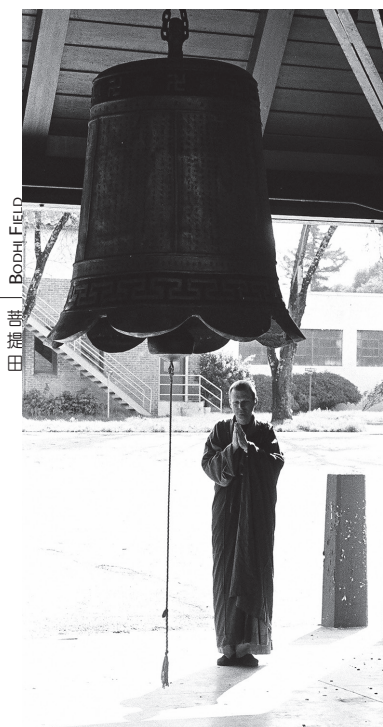


said, "You have been mindful of the Buddha, the Dharma and the Sangha sincerely all the time. When you pass away, your body is eaten by crows, vultures, stray dogs or coyotes. When your body is cremated, nevertheless your pure soul rises up towards a good place." Therefore, the purpose of ordinarily chanting Amitabha Buddha's name and even attending these 7-day sessions like this is to purify our mind so we will be naturally reborn in the Western Pure Land after death.

In fact if we really want to know our rebirth after life, we should observe our minds and our dreams and check them carefully. Are they causes of rebirth in the Pure Land or causes of rebirth in the three lower existences? Like the saying "If we

want to know our previous life, we observe our present life, which is the retribution of our previous life. If we want to know our future life, we just observe our present life, which is our cause of our future life." We should carefully examine if our karma of body, mind and speech are pure and gentle. Do we still have a terrible temper or heavy desires? Do we still hold grudges against someone or a group of people? They are causes of rebirth in the three lower existences so they shouldn't be treated lightly.

The Great Master Han Shan of the Ming Dynasty gave instructions on how to attain rebirth in the Western Pure Land. He said the first priority is to uphold the precepts to purify one's mind. Then one should sincerely vow to be born in the Western Pure Land and be mindful of Amitabha Buddha all the time. It means if the body doesn't engage in killing, stealing, and sexual misconduct then the karma of the body



到三惡道去的。就像一棵樹，從幼苗的時候就傾斜向東生長，日後若有人砍倒這棵樹，樹會朝哪個方向倒下去呢？」

摩訶男回答：「當然是朝著生長傾斜的方向倒下囉！」「摩訶男啊，你也是一樣的，」佛陀說：「你長久以來一直念佛、念法、念僧，當你死去之後，即使身體被烏鴉、禿鷹、野狗、土狼所啃食，乃至火化化成了塵末，你清淨的心靈將會引領你往生到安樂美好的地方去。」因此平日念佛，乃至今天來參加這個佛七，

目的就是清淨我們的內心，臨終時能夠自然往生清淨的西方極樂世界。

事實上，想知道自己下輩子會往生到何處去，只要觀察內心狀況和夢境中的所作所為就可以明白：是修往淨土的善因呢？還是造三惡道的惡因呢？所謂：「欲知前世因，今生受者是；欲知來世果，今生做者是。」仔細觀察自己的身口意三業，是否都調柔清淨？是不是還有很大的貪心，或者很大的脾氣？是不是對某些人或是某個人依然心懷抱怨乃至怨恨？這些都是感得三惡道的惡因，不能等閒視之。



明朝憨山大師開示，如何修行才能往生西方極樂世界？他說，第一要持戒，清淨自己的內心。接下來，是誠心的發願和念佛，求生西方極樂世界。也就是說，不殺生、不偷盜、不邪淫，則我們的身業是清淨的；不妄語、不綺語、不兩舌、不惡口，則我們的口業是清淨的；不貪、不瞋、不痴，則我們的意業是清淨的。若是能夠如此去做，則將這十種惡業永遠斷除，滅除三惡道的苦因。

相反的，若是不這樣去修行，誰也無法確定哪一天早上醒來的時候，會不會發現身上竟然有了孔雀的羽毛，投生成為萬佛聖城孔雀家族的一員？

既然修行這麼重要，為什麼人們不要好好地修行呢？《雜阿含經》中，佛陀說人們之所以不修行，是因為貪愛。人們到底貪愛什麼呢？

有一個很富貴的商人，家裡有四個妻子。商人最疼愛第四位妻子，總是給她最好的東西，華麗的衣服、美味的佳餚，精心地呵護她。商人也非常愛他的第三位妻子，以擁有她為榮，總是在朋友面前炫耀她。但是商人也是提心吊膽，為什麼呢？因為害怕第三個老婆會跟別的男人跑了。商人也愛他的第二位妻子，因為第二位妻子非常體貼，很有耐心。不管商人遇到什麼問題，總是會去找第二位妻子，都能幫他想辦法走出困境，度過難關。

商人的第一位妻子，是一位非常忠誠的人生伴侶，為了照料這個家庭付出巨大的貢獻。儘管第一位妻子深深地愛著這位商人丈夫，商人卻不愛她，一直忽略她的存在。

有一天，商人病得很嚴重，即將不久於人世，不禁自言自語的說：「現在我有四個妻子在身邊，但是當我死了之後，只剩我孤獨一人。那將是何等的孤單寂寞啊？」於是他問第四位妻子：「我最愛的就是妳了，給妳最好的享



becomes pure. If one doesn't lie, doesn't engage in frivolous speech, gossip or harsh speech, then the karma of speech becomes pure. If the mind doesn't engage in greed, hatred or stupidity, then the karma of the intellectual mind becomes pure. When in this manner, the ten evil actions will have become eternally cut off. Then the causes in the three lower realms are gone.

On the contrary, if we don't cultivate the spiritual path well, we may wake up one morning to find our bodies covered with peacock feathers and become members of the peacock family at CTTB.

Since cultivation of the spiritual path is so important, why don't people cultivate the spiritual path? In the *Samyuktāgama Sutra*, the Buddha told us that people don't cultivate the spiritual path because of their emotional love and attachments.

Once there was a rich merchant who had four wives. He loved the fourth wife the most and adorned her with rich robes and treated her to delicacies. He took great care of her and gave her nothing but the best. He also loved his third wife very much. He was very proud of her and wanted to show her off to his friends. However, the merchant was also in great fear that she might run away with other men. He also loved his second wife; she was a very considerate person, always patient. Whenever the merchant had problems, he always turned to his second wife and she would always help him out through difficult times.

The merchant's first wife was a very loyal partner and had made great contributions to the family. However, the



受、最好的照顧。現在我就快要死了，你可以跟我一起去嗎？」第四位妻子一聽，丟下「門兒都沒有！」一句話，就揚長而去。

妻子的回答，就像一把利刃刺在商人的心上。於是他去問第三位妻子：「我這一生如此愛妳，現在我就快要死了，妳能不能陪伴我一起去呢？」第三位妻子回答：「不可能的。我的生活這麼美好，追求者又這麼多，等你死後，我會再改嫁的。」商人一聽，心情跌到谷底，心寒極了。

於是只好去問第二位妻子：「我總是求助於妳，而妳也總是能幫我走出困境，現在我又需要妳的幫助了。當我死的時候，妳能不能陪伴我一起去呢？」第二位妻子回答：「對不起，親愛的，這次我真的幫不了你，最多我只能陪你到墳墓前而已。」妻子的話猶如晴天霹靂，把商人的心都打碎了。

就在這個時候，有一個聲音在旁邊說：「我會跟隨你而去，不管你去哪裡，我都會和你在一起。」商人抬頭一看，是他的第一位妻子。她骨瘦如柴，似乎長期營養不良，商人萬分的慚愧和內疚，他說：「我應該要好好照顧你的，但是我並沒有。」

事實上，每個人的一生當中，也有四位妻子或者四位丈夫。第四位妻子（丈夫），就是我們的身體。無論如何慷慨地花費時間和精力，去呵護妝扮這個身體，滿足它一切的需求，當我們死的時候，它依然離我們而去。第三位妻子（丈夫），就是我們的地位和財富。人們總是以擁有地位和財富為榮，但是不管它曾經帶來多少的榮耀，當我們死了之後，它就成為別人的了。第二位妻子（丈夫），就是我們的親人、朋友。不管彼此感情多麼親近，當我們死了之後，他們最多只能陪伴我們到墳前而已。

而第一位妻子，就是我們的心念。但是我們往往不去注意它，總是對物質、財富和感官享受打種種貪愛妄想，而不懂得念佛、念法、念僧，修行清淨的思想。由於種種貪愛妄想，使我們造了種種不好的業；而這些惡業，將引導我們墮落惡道，就像第一位妻子說的：「不管你去哪裡，我都會和你在一起。」

這個故事讓我們了解到，由於對這個世界和對自己的貪愛，所以人們無法好好修行。那麼要如何放下貪愛，不再打種種的妄想，進而能夠清淨

merchant didn't love his first wife and although she loved him deeply, he hardly took any notice of her.

One day the merchant fell ill. Before long, he knew he was going to die soon. He thought of his luxurious life and told himself, "Now I have four wives. When I die, I will be alone. How lonely I will be." He asked his fourth wife, "I loved you the most, endowed you with the finest clothing, took great care of you. I'm dying now, will you follow me and keep me company?" "No way!" replied the fourth wife. She walked away without another word.

This answer cut the merchant's heart like a sharp knife. Therefore, he then asked his third wife, "I've loved you all my life, now that I'm dying, will you follow me and keep me company?" "No!" replied the third wife. "Life is so good, I'm going to remarry after your death." The merchant's heart sank and turned cold.

He then asked his second wife, "I always turned to you for help and you have always helped me out. Now I need your help again. When I die, will you follow me and keep me company?" "I'm sorry, I cannot help you out this time" replied the second wife. "At the very most, I can only send you to your grave." The answer came like a bolt of thunder and the merchant's heart was broken.

Then a voice called out, "I will be with you, I will follow you wherever you go." The merchant looked up and there was his first wife. She was so skinny, almost like she suffered from malnutrition. Greatly grieved, the merchant said, "I should have taken much better care of you while I could have."

Actually we all have four wives or four husbands in our lives. The fourth wife/husband is our body. No matter how much time and effort we lavish in making it look good, it will leave us when we die. The third wife/husband is our status and wealth. We are very proud of them but when we die, they will go to others. The second wife/husband is our family and friends. No matter how close they are to us when we're alive, they can only be with us up to the grave.

The first wife/husband is our thoughts that are always there but goes unnoticed. In fact, our thoughts are often filled with greed for material wealth and sensual pleasures instead of developing pure thoughts such as mindfulness of the Buddha, the Dharma and the Sangha. Due to our thoughts, filled with all kinds of emotional love and attachments, we create our own bad karma that will lead us to the three evil paths. It is like the first wife telling her dying husband "I will follow you wherever you go."

After hearing this story we understand that people don't cultivate and even cannot attain rebirth in the Western Pure Land because of their emotional love and attachments to the world and their bodies. How do we develop pure mindfulness of Amitabha Buddha instead of false thoughts of greed for material wealth and sensual pleasures so we can attain rebirth in the Western Pure Land? This question is

念佛，求生西方極樂世界呢？答案就像故事中的商人，臨死才覺悟到平常應該多照顧這第一位妻子，修行會打種種的妄想，就是因為平常沒有把「無常死想」放在心上。

佛陀經常勉勵比丘修行無常死想，能獲成就和大利益。修行無常死想，應當思維只有吞下一口飯的時間可以活命，或者只有呼吸一口氣的時間可以活命，這樣全心全意專心修行，這樣才是不放逸懶散，才是真正精進斷除煩惱，才是比丘應當努力的方向。

生命的無常，僅存於一呼一吸之間，只可惜人們往往不認真看待這個事實。有一位平日非常精進用功的法師，因為病重而住院，醫師判定他一、兩天內就會死去。在醫院和他本人雙方同意之下，我們把他接回如來寺，為他安排最好的臨終助念。他問我：「法師，我回來了，現在我要做什麼？」我對他說：「你現在要準備往生。」他很驚訝地看著我：「往生？我還沒有準備好要往生啊！」十個小時之後，他就往生了。

根據統計，每一分鐘就有一百零七個人往生，我們實在不知道，何時就會輪到自己的頭上來？因此，淨土宗十三祖印光大師經常勉勵學人，應當把「死」字貼在額頭上，時時提起。

或許有人說：「一天到晚想著快要死了，不會弄得自己緊張兮兮的嗎？」事實上，時時觀想無常和死亡，能夠幫助我們去除煩惱。一休法師九歲出家，當他還是一個小沙彌的時候，有一天不小心把師父珍藏的一個古董茶杯打破了。就在這個時候，門外傳來師父的腳步聲。一休趕緊把打破的茶杯碎片收拾乾淨，藏在衣服裡。

當師父走進房間，他問師父：「師父，人為什麼一定會死呢？」「世間的一切，都是有生有死，這是自然的道理。」師父回答。一休接著問：「所有一切的東西都是這樣子的嗎？」師父肯定地說：「當然。」聽了之後，一休立刻拿出打破的茶杯碎片，對師父說：「師父，你的茶杯死期到了！」老和尚看了，一笑置之，一點也不生氣。

心愛的古董茶杯被打碎，一休和尚的師父能夠一笑置之，必然是心中常念無常死想，才能

answered in the story. When the merchant was going to die he realized that he should've taken better care of his first wife. Therefore the Buddha said people cultivate the spiritual path with lots of false thoughts because they are not mindful of death in their daily practice.

The Buddha always addressed monks that mindfulness of death would bring great fruit and benefit. When developing the mindfulness of death, one should have the thought as if they were living for the time needed to chew and swallow one morsel of food, for the time of breathing in after exhaling or for the time of breathing out after inhaling. In this way, they would direct their mind on the Buddha's teaching. By doing so, they wholeheartedly focus on their cultivation and live diligently, vigorously cutting off false thinking. This is what monks should do.

Life is impermanent. When we breathe out the air in our lungs, we cannot ensure that we can breathe in again. However, we often don't pay much attention to this fact. I'd like to share a true story with you. One monk who cultivated vigorously was hospitalized. Due to the seriousness of his sickness, the doctors said he would die in one or two days. Both the hospital and the monk agreed to go home to Tathagata Monastery, so we could provide the best condition of Amitabha Buddha's name recitation on his deathbed in the monastery. He asked me, "Dharma Master, I've come back. What am I going to do now?" I told him to prepare for rebirth. With surprise, he exclaimed, "Rebirth? I'm not prepared for rebirth yet!" However, after 10 hours he passed away.

According to statistics, there are 107 human deaths per minute in the world. We don't know when it will be our turn to die. Therefore Master Yin Guang, the 13th patriarch of the Pure Land School, said cultivators should put the word "death" on their foreheads and always think of it.

Someone may say if I think of death all the time, I will become very tense. In fact, mindfulness of impermanence and death can make us free from afflictions, instead of becoming tense. There was a young monk named Yi-Xiu (Ikkyu) who left home at the age of 9. One day during his time as a novice, he accidentally broke into pieces his teacher's teacup. It was a very beautiful antique that his teacher treasured and considered his prized possession. Hearing his teacher's footsteps coming, Yi-Xiu scooped up the pieces into his hand and then swiftly tucked them into his robe out of sight.

By the time his teacher arrived, Yi-Xiu had formulated a plan. He asked his teacher, "Why do people have to die?" His teacher answered, "Everything in the world experiences both life and death, it's natural." He asked again, "Everything?" "Of course," his teacher said with certainty. Yi-Xiu pulled out the broken pieces of teacup from his robes, showed them to his teacher and said, "It's time for your teacup to die." At that time his teacher just smiled without losing his temper.

Seeing the favorite cup broken, the teacher smiled instead of getting angry because he was observant of impermanence and death. Therefore, mindfulness of impermanence and death is the best contemplation

對境不起煩惱。所以一切想中，無常死想是為第一，因為它能除三界之中一切的貪欲、無明和我慢，進而發菩提心。這使我想起上人圓寂之後，第一位剃度出家的果義師。果義師1997年往生，距今二十年，今晚就以他真實的故事來與大家分享。

果義師1950年出生於台灣，1980年在美國取得電機碩士學位，事業一帆風順，家庭幸福美滿。1987年，他皈依宣公上人，並擔任聖荷西佛學會會長多年。平日中午用餐時刻，他就到佛學會幫忙接電話，回答佛學問題，引導許多人來學習佛法，廣結很多善緣；周末休假，就到道場幫忙修理屋頂。

1994年，他想在萬佛聖城出家，但是家人不同意。1995年上人圓寂，法總僧團決定上人圓寂三年之後，才接受新的出家申請。1996年，果義師感覺身體有些不舒服，檢查出來竟然是肝癌末期，只剩半年的生命。於是他本人以及他的家人都來請求僧團能夠讓他出家，那時上人才剛剛圓寂一年，所以我們就很低調地在國際譯經學院為他舉行出家剃度儀式，滿了他的願。

至今我還記憶猶新，他在這個講台上跟大家報告他的情形。他自認一生沒有做過什麼壞事，為什麼才四十七歲，就得到這種短命的果報？他說：「幸好我學了佛法，知道了三世因果。那是因為過去生造的業，才会有今生的果報。所以，我不會抱怨。」

之後病情逐漸嚴重，他希望能住進醫院，方便俗家人探望；住院幾天之後，雖然有家人的陪伴，他還是決定回來萬佛聖城。當救護車還在醫院門口等候時，他就在醫院裡往生了。

接到他往生的消息，我剛好在佛殿參加午供，由於時間緊迫，我和江法師兩個人就先趕去醫院。趕往醫院的路上，我心想：這個時候在聖城是最難找人的，因為大家正在吃飯。當走進病房，他的眼睛張開著，嘴巴也張得大大，家人則在一旁哭泣。於是我快步將他的臉蓋上，就在這個時候，以前他在聖荷西的朋友們剛好來醫院探望他，於是大家誠心地為他助念。助念八個小時，做完念佛功德迴向之後，我掀開他臉上的布，他的眼睛閉上了，嘴角也露出了笑容。

果義師能有這麼殊勝的助念因緣，我想是他以前總是在午休時間幫助大家，所以即使在中午最

because it can get rid of our greed, ignorance and arrogance in the three realms and help us bring forth bodhi resolve. It also reminds me of the late shramanera Guo Yi, who was the first one to leave home after the Master entered nirvana and passed away in 1997. It has been 20 years since he passed away. Here I'd like to share his story with you.

Guo Yi Shr was born in Taiwan in 1950 and earned a master's degree in electronic engineering in the United States in 1980. He had a successful career and a happy family. After taking refuge with Master Hua in 1987, he was the chairperson of the San Jose Lay Buddhist Association for years. While working, he would spend his lunch hour at the Buddhist Association, helping to answer the phone and guiding many people to study Buddhism. During the holidays, he helped repair the roof at the monastery.

In 1994, he came to CTTB in an attempt to leave the home life but he gave up because his family didn't agree. In 1995, the DRBA Sangha decided to accept new left home people three years after Venerable Master's nirvana. Unfortunately, in 1996 he was diagnosed with terminal liver cancer and found out he only had half a year to live. At that time he and his family came and begged us to let him leave home. We fulfilled their wish and held his leaving home ceremony at ITI in Burlingame. That was a very low-key affair because Venerable Master Hua just entered nirvana the previous year.

I still remember 20 years ago he reported his conditions on this platform. He believed he didn't do any evil in his whole life, but why did he have such retribution of a short lifetime of 47 years? "Fortunately, after learning Buddhism, I understand cause and effect in the three periods of time. Because of my karma in the past, I have such retribution in this life. I never complain." he said.

However, when his conditions became critical, he asked to stay in the hospital where it was more convenient for his family to visit him. Although his family was with him at the Ukiah Hospital for several days, he wished to return to CTTB. When the ambulance was waiting outside to bring him back to the City, he passed away.

When I received the news of his death, it was during the meal offering before lunch. Dharma Master Jiang and I immediately went to the hospital in a hurry. On the way to the hospital I thought, lunchtime is a difficult time to pull people away from CTTB because people needed to eat. When we arrived at the hospital, his eyes were wide open and his mouth was gaping wide. His family was weeping beside him. I covered his face with a piece of cloth. At that time, all of his friends from San Jose just visited him. We sincerely recited Amitabha Buddha's name beside him. After chanting the Buddha's name for eight hours and holding the transference of merit, we removed the piece of cloth covering his face. His eyes closed and he had a smile on his face.

I thought when he was still a layperson, spending his lunch hour helping people when everyone else was eating, he created such unique

難找人助念的時候往生，正好出現一群人誠心地為他助念。所以不要小看平日助人的點滴，福德就是在這一點一滴中累積成就的。同時果義師的故事也證明，念佛的功德感應不可思議，人即使死了之後，還會歡喜地微笑。

然而，佛法說公修公得，婆修婆得，一切都是自作自受，那麼念佛功德真得可以迴向給別人嗎？其實，功德迴向，並不是將自己所做的善行功德百分之百的轉移給對方，代替對方行善。如果真的可以百分之百轉移，代替對方行善的話，諸佛菩薩那麼的慈悲，功德是這樣的廣大，早就可以將祂們所有的善功德通通轉移給眾生。那麼，我們現在都應該在極樂世界，世界上應該都沒有三惡道了，不是嗎？

那麼迴向功德究竟是什麼呢？其實就像臨終助念，助念者雖然誠心地念阿彌陀佛聖號，但是並不能代替臨命終人念，只能提供念佛的善緣，來幫助臨終者提起正念，或者激發他求生西方的菩提心。至於是否能夠往生極樂，還是要看臨終者是否真正發願求生西方極樂世界，誠心稱念阿彌陀佛聖號，才能夠決定的。

任何行善，乃至持咒、誦經、念佛的功德迴向給別人，目的是希望對方能獲得加持，啟發善根，發出善心，或者隨喜他人行善，或者自己身體力行，自然就有好的果報及感應。

同樣的道理，上人慈悲地教導我們設立往生牌位來利益眾生，但是往生牌位並不是往生極樂的許可證。因此，我們不應該認為設了牌位之後，亡者就必定會往生到西方極樂世界去。如果這樣認為，那是一種迷信，因為連諸佛菩薩也做不到這種保證。若是儘靠往生牌位和迴向，就能讓亡者往生西方的話，那麼我們現在都應該在西方極樂世界了，因為只要寫一個牌位，迴向一下，那是很簡單的。

設立往生牌位，是為亡者供養三寶，代表的是布施的功德，也是鼓勵亡者努力修行，往生極樂世界，得到真正的解脫；另一方面，生者也有機會親近三寶，因此可

conditions. When he passed away at lunchtime - the most difficult time to pull people away from CTTB, all his friends from San Jose appeared to help him. Therefore, never neglect the importance of helping others in ordinary times. Blessings are generated through helping others at ordinary times as well as how inconceivable the merit is from chanting Amitabha Buddha's name is. Even the deceased can smile happily by hearing Amitabha Buddha's name recitation.

However, in Buddhism one reaps what one sows and one reaps nothing if one hasn't sown. How can merit from chanting Buddha's name be transferred to someone else? In fact, the transference of merit doesn't mean all good deeds that you've done can completely transfer to someone else. If it's possible, then all the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas, who are so kind and compassionate would have completely transferred their good deeds to all living beings and we should be in the Pure Land or at least there are no three evil paths now, right?

What exactly is transference of merit? It's just like when we chant Amitabha Buddha's name around a dying person. We cannot take the place of the dying person but we can provide the person favorable conditions conducive to the recitation of Amitabha Buddha's name. We may help the person recite Amitabha's holy name and bring forth the Bodhi resolve to attain rebirth in the Western Pure Land. However, whether or not that person will be reborn in the Western Pure Land depends on the person's Bodhi resolve to attain rebirth there and the sincerity of their recitation of Amitabha Buddha's name.

Transferring merit from doing good deeds such as helping others out, chanting mantras, Sutras and the Buddha's name will inspire the recipients to bring forth their good roots and good thoughts, rejoice in our good deeds or even taken actions to practice good deeds. For sure, the recipient will have good rewards and response in return.

In the same way, the Venerable Master was very kind and compassionate to teach us to set up rebirth plaques to benefit living beings. However the plaques are the passport to be reborn in the Western Pure Land. So we shouldn't think that the deceased will be reborn in the Western Pure Land after we set up a rebirth plaque for them, it's superstitious. Even Buddhas and Bodhisattvas are unable to do that. If setting up a rebirth plaque and transferring merit can send the deceased to the Western Pure Land, then we should all be there now because it is very easy to do.

Setting up a rebirth plaque means to make offerings to the Three Jewels on behalf of the deceased. It is the merit and virtue of giving. Also, it's encouragement to the deceased so they can vigorously cultivate to attain rebirth in the Western Pure Land as well as ultimate liberation. On the other hand, setting up a rebirth plaque enables living beings to draw near and make offerings to the Three Jewels, so it benefits the world and the underworld. It's very important that we should believe the Venerable Master's great compassion and wisdom and have a proper concept towards setting up the plaques. Don't believe the myth that it would bring a negative impact to those who set up the plaques or the monastics at the temple.

Amitabha Buddha made a vow that he would appear to and receive the dying person who is reciting his name to the Western Pure Land. Unfortunately,

以說是冥陽兩利。我們必須相信上人廣大的慈悲和智慧，對於設立牌位要有正確的觀念，不要迷信會造成設立牌位的人或是廟上出家人負面的影響。

阿彌陀佛發願十方世界的眾生，臨命終時只要稱念祂的名號，祂就前來接引往生西方極樂。可惜的是，人要往生的時候，往往都是失去正念，無法稱念阿彌陀佛。所以臨終時要有正念，平時念佛就是準備人生最後一念的工作。

以上這些故事，告訴我們往生最重要的三個因緣：第一個是平生的習慣，第二個是所造的業，第三個就是臨終的最後一念。第一個故事中，佛陀用一棵樹的譬喻，告訴摩訶男不用擔心死後的去處，因為平常已經有念佛、念法、念僧的習慣，即使意外死去，這個習氣的力量依然會引導他趨向正念，就像樹往生長的方向倒下。

第二個是業。這一生若能斷除十惡業，行持十善業，來世將免於墮落三惡道。若是更能修行信願持名的念佛淨業，必然能夠往生到西方極樂世界去。

第三個就是臨終最後的一念。上人說有人平時念佛，到臨終的時候就忘掉了，為什麼會這樣子呢？因為沒有準備好要往生。所以佛陀告訴我們，經常要有無常死想，要想：如果下一秒鐘就要死了，我現在該怎麼辦？經常這樣訓練自己，漸漸就能放下種種的貪著；當臨終時刻突然到來，很自然就能萬緣放下，提起正念，一心稱念阿彌陀佛，往生西方極樂。

淨土問答：

問：念佛一聲罪滅河沙，我們應該怎麼樣唸，才能夠達到這樣子的效果呢？

上人：要專一齊心的念。

問：要如何穩定心性，專心的念佛呢？

上人：少吃一點飯。

問：散亂心念佛，應該如何調伏？

上人：念多了就不亂了。你若能夠念一日、若二日、若三日、若四日、若五日、若六日、若七日，這樣子一心不斷的，你常常念就不會散亂了。你不常常念，當然會散亂。❀

most people lose their mindfulness of the Buddha and fail to recite Amitabha Buddha's name upon dying. Therefore, it is important to maintain the mindfulness of the Buddha on the deathbed. The goal of reciting the Buddha's name during ordinary times is to ensure the mindfulness of the Buddha when death comes.

The stories shared above are to tell us three factors of attaining rebirth in the Pure Land. The first is our habit; second, the karma we create; and the third, the last thought before death. In the first story, the Buddha used a tree as an analogy to comfort Mahānāma not to fear his future destination. Because of his habitual momentum to be mindful of the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha, even if he died accidentally, he would be reborn in a good place like a tree falling towards the direction it has been leaning.

The second is the karma we created in this life. We should cut off the ten evil deeds, then we can be far away from the three evil paths. If we can cultivate, have faith in, vow to be reborn in the Pure Land and uphold Amitabha Buddha's name, then inevitably we could be reborn in the Pure Land.

The third is the last thought on our deathbed. Master Hua told us sometimes people forget to recite Amitabha Buddha's name when they are approaching the end of life even if they recited it regularly. Why? Because they are not prepared for death. The Buddha told us we should practice mindfulness of death during ordinary times, just like we are going to die the next moment. By practicing this mindfulness, we will gradually let go of attachments. When the final moment comes, we would not panic and can concentrate on Amitabha Buddha's name and our desire to be reborn in the Pure Land.

Q&A on Pure Land Dharma Door:

Question: Chanting the Buddha's name once eradicates offenses equal in number to the grains of sand in the river. How should we chant the Buddha's name to achieve that?

The Venerable Master answered: Stay focused and concentrated when you chant.

Question: How can we stabilize our temperament and focus when chanting the Buddha's name?

The Venerable Master answered: Eat a little less.

Question: How do we conquer the scattered mind whenever chanting the Buddha's name? What method can we use?

The Venerable Master answered: The more you chant, the less scattered your mind will be. You should chant for one day, two days, three, four, five, six, up to seven days single-mindedly. Since you don't chant regularly, of course you cannot stay focused. ❀