

The forty eight vows of Amitābha Buddha

Prayers and recitations

CONTEMPLATION

The Buddha and living beings have a nature forever empty and still.
The communion of the Way is inconceivable.
May this place of practice be like Indra's net of jewels;
may the precious Buddhas of the ten directions shine with radiant light.
Before the jeweled throne, my body appears like a reflection;
I bow my head and vow to take refuge.

With wholehearted devotion I bow: homage to the Buddhas of the ten directions, past, present, and future; to the noble Dharma; to the wise and holy community; to the ever-abiding Three Jewels throughout limitless space and the entire Dharma realm. (One prostration.)

With wholehearted devotion I bow: homage to Śākyamuni Buddha, our original teacher and guide of the Sahā world; to the honored Maitreya Buddha who will descend in the future; to Mañjuśrī Bodhisattva of great wisdom; to Samantabhadra Bodhisattva of great practice; to the venerable bodhisattva protectors of the Dharma; and to the Buddhas and bodhisattvas of the assembly on Vulture Peak. (One prostration.)

With wholehearted devotion I bow: homage to Amitābha Buddha, the greatly loving and compassionate guide who receives beings into the Western World of Ultimate Bliss; to Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva of great compassion; to Mahāsthāmaprāpta Bodhisattva; to Kṣitigarbha Bodhisattva, king of great vows; and to the pure, oceanlike assembly of bodhisattvas. (One prostration.)

PRAISE OF INCENSE

The incense burns warmly in the censer;
its fragrance permeates the Dharma realm.
The Buddhas in their oceanlike assembly perceive it from afar.
Auspicious clouds form everywhere.
Our sincere intention rises with deep devotion;
the Buddhas manifest their entire bodies.

Homage to the Bodhisattva of the Canopy of Incense Clouds. (Twice.)
Homage to the Bodhisattva Mahāsattva of the Canopy of Incense Clouds.

Homage to our original teacher, Śākyamuni Buddha. (Three times.)

SŪTRA OPENING VERSE

The unsurpassed, profound, subtle, and wondrous Dharma
is hard to encounter even in a hundred thousand myriad kalpas.
Now that I can see, hear, receive, and uphold it,
may I understand the Tathāgata's true meaning.

Teacher of the West,
compassionate sage of the Pure Land,
your resolve to receive living beings never falters.
Those with the right conditions are born in the Pure Land of Bliss;
freed from Saḥā, they behold Amitābha.
Forty-eight vows bring deliverance to living beings;
may these vast aspirations be fulfilled.
In the pond of nine grades of lotuses, may we be born in the highest grade;
together with all beings, may we complete the Buddha Way.

Homage to the Bodhisattva of the Pure Land Section. (Twice.)
Homage to the Bodhisattva Mahāsattva of the Pure Land Section.

THE FORTY EIGHT VOWS OF AMITĀBHA BUDDHA

Vow 1

When I attain Buddhahood, my land will be pure and clear. Hells, hungry ghosts, and animals will not arise there.

Vow 2

In this pure realm, women and girls will be absent. Those from the human and heavenly realms, and animals who diligently cultivate the path, will all receive birth by transformation in ponds of the seven jewels and lotus flowers of the nine grades.

Vow 3

Whenever the inhabitants of my Buddha land need food or drink, it will appear ready for them. Bowls made of the seven jewels will hold an abundance of a hundred delicious dishes, without any need to prepare them elsewhere. After the meal, the utensils will disappear by themselves, without the trouble of washing or wiping them.

Vow 4

Whenever the inhabitants desire clothes, cloths, combs, hats, or shoes, all will appear ready at hand. They will have no trouble buying, washing, or sewing them.

Vow 5

Everywhere, from the ground up into space, pavilions, palaces, trees, fruit, ponds, rivers, and houses will be made of precious treasures and countless jeweled flowers and fragrances, joined together in beautiful adornment. Their scent will spread everywhere; all ten directions will receive it at once. Beings who persevere in their practices and vows, who trust in and remember the Buddha, will be born there when their time comes.

Vow 6

The good inhabitants of this land will love and respect one another like members of one family. There will be no discordant words, no jealousy, no hatred leading to quarrels.

Vow 7

The inhabitants will have no defiled or lustful thoughts. There will be no crude speech, anger, confusion, or ignorance.

Vow 8

They will maintain wholesome thoughts and advance gradually along the right path. If one wishes to communicate something, another will immediately understand the intention, without any need for explanation.

Vow 9

These compassionate inhabitants will hear no harmful accounts. How could they themselves do evil? Karmic obstacles will no longer even have a name.

Vow 10

All beings will regard their illusory bodies as no more than dreams. Their minds will therefore remain unstained by worldly life. Their nature will be free from greed and craving, and everywhere they will dwell in joy.

Vow 11

Although heavenly beings and humans differ, their forms will all have the same golden color. Their faces will be dignified, harmonious, clear, and incomparably beautiful.

Vow 12

Heavenly beings, humans, and animals from the worlds of the ten directions will be born by transformation in my land of bliss. Those who attain the stages of solitary awakened ones and hearers will be alike there. Sitting in meditation with tranquil hearts, they may join together to calculate their ages, but will never know their number: thousands, myriads, and hundreds of millions of kalpas will not suffice to determine it.

Vow 13

Even if these heavenly beings and humans join together to count the inhabitants of my peaceful land, they will never discover the total, for they are as numerous as the sands of the Ganges.

Vow 14

All inhabitants of my land will enjoy vast and continuous lifespans. No one will be able to know their number of years: their lives will extend over immeasurable and boundless kalpas.

Vow 15

These pure inhabitants will naturally abide in right faith. Free from confused and inverted thoughts, they will attain nondiscrimination and realize nirvāṇa.

Vow 16

The inhabitants of the Land of Bliss will joyfully enjoy all things, like monks who have realized freedom from defilements and no longer follow worldly concerns.

Vow 17

When I become a Buddha, I will teach the sūtras, expound the truth, and deliver living beings. I will fulfill my aspirations and bring my work of teaching the Way to incomparable perfection.

Vow 18

Born by transformation, without sexual union, all will possess knowledge of their former lives. They will know existences in the distant past, as numerous as the sands of the Ganges, as clearly as their present life.

Vow 19

All these countless beings will possess the pure radiance of the heavenly eye. They will see the entire universe in the ten directions and clearly know hundreds of thousands of myriads of worlds.

Vow 20

The inhabitants of the West will possess heavenly hearing and hear from afar the teachings proclaimed by hundreds of thousands of millions of Buddhas.

Vow 21

The humans and heavenly beings of my land will possess knowledge of others' minds, without error. The thoughts and intentions of beings in thousands and myriads of worlds will not lie beyond this spiritual faculty.

Vow 22

The beings of my land will realize the power of supernatural travel. They will roam freely through worlds everywhere and cross them all more swiftly than flight.

Vow 23

When I become a Buddha, my name will be clearly known throughout the ten directions. Buddhas and their great assemblies will praise it; my inhabitants will repeatedly turn to me in devotion. Heavenly beings, humans, and animals who recite my name with true sincerity, bringing joy and goodness into their hearts, will at death be born by transformation in a golden lotus.

Vow 24

The light shining from my head will be wondrous and brilliant. Though the sun and moon are bright, their light will not equal the Buddha's radiance.

Vow 25

My light will illuminate every dark place and hidden corner. Heavenly beings, humans, and animals who see it will immediately give rise to a sincere wish to take refuge.

Vow 26

Whatever humans or animals there may be throughout the universe of the ten directions, when my light touches their bodies, their hearts and dispositions will become gentler and more benevolent than those of the heavenly realms.

Vow 27

Heavenly beings and humans who awaken the aspiration for enlightenment, persevere in precepts and abstinence, cultivate the six perfections, and continually perform many meritorious deeds will be received when their lives reach their end. Together with the community of virtuous monks, I will emit light to guide them to rebirth, so that they become bodhisattvas in the Land of Bliss.

Vow 28

Heavenly beings and humans throughout the universe who hear my name will prepare incense, flowers, lamps, candles, banners, and jeweled canopies as offerings to the Tathāgata. They will build stūpas and temples, observe abstinence in purity, do good, and concentrate their minds upon me. If they maintain this remembrance for just one full day, they will assuredly come to my land.

Vow 29

Heavenly beings and humans of the ten directions who wholeheartedly wish to leave the shore of delusion and concentrate on my name for ten invocations will be born at death in the Land of Bliss. Excluded are the cruel and corrupt and those who scorn the Buddha and Dharma: bearing such offenses, they will suffer torment throughout their existence in Avīci hell.

Vow 30

Heavenly beings, humans, and animals throughout the immeasurable universe who have previously committed wrongs, then hear the Buddha's name and openly acknowledge their deeds, will seek repentance, observe abstinence, and refrain from killing. If they vow to do good and seek birth in the Buddha's land, they will find peace at death, escape the three painful destinies, and be born by transformation upon a lotus.

Vow 31

Heavenly beings and humans of the ten directions who hear my name, bow, and turn toward me will joyfully cultivate the path of awakening and receive everyone's respect and praise.

Vow 32

Women and girls in the worlds of the ten directions who turn away from worldly existence and develop faith while reciting my name will not assume a female body again in their next life.

Vow 33

Upon arriving, beings will immediately realize nonarising and nonretrogression, and will also complete Buddhahood. An exception is made for those whose original vow is to save living beings: I will help them fulfill their aspiration and bring aid to sentient beings in other worlds. Their bodhisattva practice will be profound; I will also support them with spiritual power so that those who see them advance diligently. Beings who, trusting in deliverance, make their vows will earnestly cultivate awakening, peaceful cessation, and Samantabhadra's practice, progressing toward supreme excellence.

Vow 34

The good inhabitants of my land who save living beings in the various directions will see their aspirations fulfilled. They will no longer bear evil karma leading to the three painful destinies.

Vow 35

Bodhisattvas who wish to make offerings to Buddhas wherever they may be will have flowers, incense, necklaces, and precious pearls. They will travel everywhere within the time of a meal.

Vow 36

Countless precious objects for offerings to Buddhas, saints, and sages will appear as soon as they are wished for. After presenting offerings everywhere, they will return to their land before noon.

Vow 37

Those who read, recite, receive, uphold, and honor the sūtras will gain intelligent eloquence, together with prajñā, sublime and wholesome wisdom.

Vow 38

When expounding the principles of the Dharma, they will possess complete understanding and a mind full of wisdom. Their words will fully explain the subtle, profound, and wondrous meanings of the sūtras.

Vow 39

The bodhisattvas of my land will all be courageous, steadfast, and diligent. Each will possess a golden body bearing the thirty-two excellent marks. Their teachings will embrace the whole Buddhist path, just like those of the Buddhas of the present.

Vow 40

My land will be truly pure and radiant. If bodhisattvas wish to see the adornments of any Buddha land, they will look into the jeweled tree: the landscapes and their Buddhas will appear there as in a mirror.

Vow 41

Bodhisattvas whose virtues and merits are not yet complete will be able to hear and see the place of practice, reaching four thousand nayutas in height.

Vow 42

The everyday objects of my land will be pure and radiant, their forms so splendid and beautiful that even the heavenly eye will be unable to gaze upon them.

Vow 43

As soon as the inhabitants of my land wish to hear the Dharma and sūtras, their aspiration will naturally be fulfilled, without waiting for the customary invitations of the world.

Vow 44

The hearers and solitary awakened ones of my land will all possess spiritual powers. Their radiance will shine without limit, and their eloquence in teaching the Dharma will equal that of the Dharma King.

Vow 45

Bodhisattvas in other worlds who hear my name will advance and put it into practice. All will obtain the Dharma of purity, concentration, liberation, and blessings of merit. If they wish to make offerings to the Buddha and Dharma, they will visit, within one hour, worlds as numerous as the sands of the Ganges. Though the distances are immense, they will not lose concentration or depart from meditation.

Vow 46

Venerable bodhisattvas in other worlds who hear my name, take refuge, and practice diligently will abide in the concentration of equality without departing from it. They will attain patience regarding the Dharma until perfect awakening and will constantly behold the Tathāgatas.

Vow 47

Bodhisattvas from other worlds who come into my land will realize the nonduality of their aspiration and will never fall back from their lofty and profound position.

Vow 48

Bodhisattvas in other worlds who bow and take refuge will fulfill their aspirations. They will obtain the first, second, and third kinds of patience regarding the noble Dharma. The Buddha's methods are immeasurable and will always abide in the world without ceasing.

When Dharmākara had completed all his vows, the three-thousandfold world shook in six ways. Incense and flowers rained down in abundance, and a voice in space proclaimed, "You will assuredly become a Tathāgata."

REPENTANCE AND ASPIRATION

We, your disciples, since beginningless time,
have committed so many wrongs through delusion,
immersed again and again in birth and death.
Now we come before unsurpassed awakening,
after long wandering in the ocean of worldly suffering,
with countless devastated beings,
living in sorrow and hardship.

I am lost and cannot find my direction.
Your ignorant children have long wandered without shelter.
Today we see the splendor of the Way;
we turn for refuge to your compassionate light.
O Buddha, illuminate the path and guide our steps.
The wrongs and pains of evil, defiled paths
arise from greed, hatred, ignorance, and pride.
Today we vow to keep our commitments fully.

We seek repentance to set our hearts free.
The Buddha's radiant wisdom is like the sun and moon;
his boundless compassion saves all beings.
For so long, in the three paths of torment,
we have been imprisoned; I vow to escape.
Following your footsteps, I will cross these hardships,
carried in compassion's boat across the river of attachment.
I remember your words: "The shore of awakening is not far."

Practice the ten good actions to brighten life.
Abandon evil to make the world clear and bright.
Spread blessings among ordinary beings.
I keep your precious words forever in my heart.

I vow to live generously.
I recite the Buddha's name to keep in mind
the image of the one who frees beings from suffering,
and to follow him upon the wholesome path.

We suffer: may our suffering be relieved.
We suffer: may we work for our own deliverance.
Cast out greed and anger that fill the sky;
dispel delusion with sublime wisdom.
I remember Amitābha and his land of happiness.
Amitābha Buddha has a body of golden color;
his excellent marks and radiance naturally adorn him.

The white tuft between his brows extends like five Mount Sumerus;
his clear eyes are like the four great oceans.
Countless Buddhas appear within his radiance,
and countless bodhisattvas are manifested there.

His forty-eight vows save living beings;
nine grades of golden lotuses raise them toward liberation.
I take refuge and bow to Amitābha Buddha
in the peaceful Western World.
I now vow to be born there;
in your compassion, please receive and guide me.

Homage to Amitābha Buddha, the greatly loving and compassionate guide who receives
beings into the Western World of Ultimate Bliss.

Homage to Amitābha Buddha. (108 recitations; the venerable chants for approximately 10
to 15 minutes.)

Homage to Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva of great compassion. (Three recitations.)

Homage to Mahāsthāmaprāpta Bodhisattva. (Three recitations.)

Homage to Kṣitigarbha Bodhisattva. (Three recitations.)

Homage to the pure, oceanlike assembly of bodhisattvas. (Three recitations.)

With wholehearted devotion I bow: homage to Amitābha Buddha, teacher of the adorned
Land of Bliss, greatly loving and compassionate guide who receives living beings. (Three
recitations.)

With wholehearted devotion I bow: homage to Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva of great love
and compassion, who responds to the calls of beings.

With wholehearted devotion I bow: homage to Mahāsthāmaprāpta Bodhisattva of great
courage and power.

With wholehearted devotion I bow: homage to Kṣitigarbha Bodhisattva of great
compassion and great vows.

With wholehearted devotion I bow: homage to the pure, oceanlike assembly of
bodhisattvas.

With a single heart I take refuge
and bow to Amitābha Buddha.
In the World of Ultimate Bliss,
may his pure light shine upon me;
may his compassion receive me.
Now, with right mindfulness,
I recite the Tathāgata's name.
For the sake of the path of awakening,
I seek birth in the Pure Land.
Long ago the Buddha made this vow:
"If beings wish to be born in my land,
let them give rise to faith and aspiration,
even for ten invocations;
if they are not born there,
I will not attain perfect awakening."
Through these causes and conditions,
reciting this Buddha's name
allows us to enter the ocean
of the Tathāgata's vastness.
Through the power of his compassion,
wrongs are extinguished

and wholesome roots increase.
When life approaches its end,
may we know in advance the time of death;
may the body be free of painful illness,
the heart free of attachment,
and the mind free of confusion,
as if entering meditative concentration.
May the Buddha and the noble assembly,
holding a golden lotus seat in their hands,
come together to receive us.
Within a single thought,
may we be born in Ultimate Bliss.
When the lotus opens, may we see the Buddha
and understand the meaning of the Buddha Vehicle.
May the Buddha come to us even in dreams;
may we save living beings everywhere
and fulfill our vows of awakening.

Living beings are innumerable: I vow to save them all.
Afflictions are inexhaustible: I vow to end them all.
Dharma gates are countless: I vow to study and practice them all.
The Buddha Way is unsurpassed: I vow to fulfill it.

DEDICATION OF MERIT

The merit of reciting the sūtra is an excellent practice.
We dedicate its boundless and incomparable blessings.
May all beings throughout the Dharma realm
swiftly be born in the land of the Buddha of Infinite Light.
May the three obstacles vanish and afflictions be dispelled.
May we attain true, bright, and clear wisdom.
May all wrongs and obstructions be removed.
Life after life, may we always follow the bodhisattva path.
May we be born in the Western Pure Land,
with lotuses of the nine grades as our parents.
When the flower opens, may we see the Buddha and realize nonarising,
with nonretrogressing bodhisattvas as our companions.
May this merit
extend universally to all.
Together with all living beings,
may we complete the Buddha Way.

THE THREE REFUGES

I take refuge in the Buddha. May all beings deeply understand the great Way and awaken
the unsurpassed aspiration. (One prostration.)

I take refuge in the Dharma. May all beings enter deeply into the treasury of the sūtras and possess wisdom as vast as the ocean. (One prostration.)

I take refuge in the Saṅgha. May all beings harmoniously guide the great assembly and be free from every obstruction. (One prostration.)

FINAL DEDICATION

May this merit
be directed to everyone, everywhere.
May we, disciples and living beings,
fully accomplish the Buddha Way. (One prostration.)