

# **The Benefits of Amitabha-Recitation In Our Present and Future Lives**

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It is said in the Buddhist scriptures, **“Amitabha positions himself constantly above the heads of those who recite his name and protects them day and night. He does not let their enemies approach them easily. Reciters enjoy peace and security in the present life. When they die, they are reborn as a matter of course in the Pure Land.”**

The meaning of this passage is this: Those who recite the name of Amitabha Buddha may be infinite in their variety. But it matters not whether their minds are pure or impure, whether they know or do not know how to practice meritorious deeds, whether they are saintly or ordinary beings, or whether they are householders or monastics. So long as they resolve to recite Amitabha’s name exclusively and are willing to be reborn in his Pure Land, they are Amitabha-reciters.

What benefits will a reciter gain? They are the “twin benefits” mentioned in the scripture – those of the present life and the future life.

What are the benefits of the present life?

**Amitabha positions himself constantly above the heads of those who recite his name and protects them day and night.**

Amitabha Buddha always places himself above the heads of reciters, protecting them day and night. He takes care of them and supports them all the time. Whatever a reciter’s status, capabilities, afflictions, karmic obstructions or false thoughts, Amitabha treats him or her in the same manner, without discrimination. Amitabha does not make distinctions, is not picky and never gives up on anyone. He treats friends and enemies equally and considers self and others as a single entity. He has no attachments and is not calculating. He discards all arbitrary notions of self, others, living beings and their continuing existence. A Buddha takes beings’ minds as his own mind and their circumstances as his own. He regards all beings as his own self. In the words of the *Infinite Life Sutra*:

***As for sentient beings, he sees them as his own self.***

The sutra also says:

***Uninvited, he becomes a friend to multitudes of beings and shoulders their heavy karmic burdens.***

Amitabha Buddha does not need to be asked or invited; he takes the initiative to become our close friend. He redeems all the karmic obstructions we accumulated in our past lives. He frees us from the cycle of rebirth and guides us towards rebirth in the Pure Land.

So in practicing Pure Land, we are not requesting anything from Amitabha Buddha. Rather, it is Amitabha who is asking us to allow him to protect and save us. The Pure Land school thus underscores the great unconditional kindness and universal compassion of Amitabha Buddha.

In our world, the love that parents have for their children is a bit like that. Parents take the initiative to feed their infants with milk and change their diapers, as well as to raise them and take care of them. They strive to eliminate all obstacles to their offspring's growth. They make sound plans and arrangements for a lifetime. Such are the sentiments of parents.

Amitabha Buddha used five *kalpas* to prepare his blueprint of the 48 Vows on our behalf. He then took countless eons to complete the realm where we will be reborn (the Western Land of Bliss), to accomplish the merit necessary for us to go there from our Saha world, and to accumulate the virtue needed to repay the karmic debts from our past lives, which stem from killing, eating meat, greed, lust, mendacity and slander. The required virtues have all been embedded in the great six-character name, *Namo Amitabha Buddha*, which we can rely on and recite easily.

"Namo Amitabha Buddha" is the crystallization of all merit and virtue. It is also the manifestation of Amitabha's body, as the name and the body are a single entity. So if we recite "Namo Amitabha Buddha," Amitabha will respond and appear, positioning himself at all times above our heads as well as in our minds and bodies. Thus Amitabha Buddha is with us every moment as we go here and there, as we stand up and lie down.

During our previous lives, we accumulated an enormous karmic burden. How big is it? As vast as there is space in the universe! That is why the sutras say that if the karmic obstructions of sentient beings were to take form, the entire cosmos and all the Dharma realms would not be big enough to accommodate them.

In those lives we've also had countless enemies and creditors. They always want to exact their payback, but they would not be in the same domain as we if they fell into the hell or animal realms. In that case, the circumstances would not exist for them to take revenge. If they are in the same realm, however, they will retaliate against us when conditions are ripe.

If someone does good frequently and accumulates merit, or is filial or righteous, his or her foes and creditors would not be able to approach easily. Otherwise, especially if the person fails to recite Amitabha Buddha's name, the adversaries will show up to collect their debts.

Not only are enemies and creditors unable to get near an Amitabha-reciter, a reciter can save them as well. That is because Amitabha Buddha dwells above the head of a reciter, who then emits Amitabha's light from his mind. The light can dissolve the vindictiveness of the enemies and creditors, soften their stubborn minds and pacify their spiteful hearts. If their roots of righteousness should ripen, the occasion could even cause them to be reborn in the Land of Bliss.

So it is said, **"He does not let their enemies approach them easily. Reciters enjoy peace and security in the present life. When they die, they are reborn in the Pure Land."**

"Reciters enjoy peace and security in the present life" means that they often turn bad luck into good fortune and peril into safety; they also transform major adversity into minor difficulty, while small troubles vanish into nothingness. Reciters are relatively capable of weathering unfavorable conditions and achieving positive outcomes under various circumstances.

"As a matter of course" means without the need for any effort and without difficulty. "When they die, they are reborn as a matter of course in the Pure Land." That is to say, at the point of death one will naturally be reborn in the Land of Bliss, effortlessly and with no obstructions. Amitabha-recitation can therefore eradicate our karmic obstructions in this life, so that when we die Amitabha Buddha will lead the Bodhisattvas Avalokitesvara and Mahasthamaprapta and the rest of the pure, sacred assembly to welcome us to the Land of Bliss.

Master Shandao said, **“Sentient beings who recite Amitabha’s name can immediately clear the offenses of many kalpas. When they die, Amitabha and the sacred assembly will appear naturally to welcome them. This cannot be impeded by any negative karma. Therefore [recitation] is known as an augmentative cause.”**

This teaching combines the meanings of the *Contemplation Sutra* and the *Amitabha Sutra*. The *Contemplation Sutra* says that a reciter can eliminate great karmic obstructions simply through Amitabha-recitation – that a single recitation can clear heavy offenses accumulated over eight billion kalpas. The *Amitabha Sutra* notes that when reciters die, Amitabha Buddha and the sacred assembly will appear before them to receive them into the Land of Bliss. Thus it is said, “When they die, they are reborn as a matter of course in the Pure Land.”

- *From Lesson 9 of discourses in the Minnan dialect (of Taiwan and Fujian) to fellow practitioners, March 24, 2007*