

# THE FAITH FACTOR

The Treatise On Ten Doubts  
About Pure Land

净土十疑论



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南无阿弥陀佛

Homage To [And Refuge For Life In] Amitā[bha] Buddha

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The Treatise On Ten Doubts  
About Pure Land  
净土十疑论

隋天台智者大师著  
优婆塞沈时安英译

Written by Sui Dynasty's Tiantai Tradition's  
Great Master Zhizhe  
Translated to English by Upāsaka Shen Shi'an



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tde@thedailyenlightenment.com

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## Brief Introduction Of Pure Land

There are immeasurable beings, who have perfected their compassion and wisdom, having become Buddhas, with Śākyamuni Buddha being one of them. With immeasurable compassion and wisdom, they would naturally create spiritual schools (Pure Lands) to better guide us to become Buddhas like them. With immeasurable compassion and wisdom, they too would, together, most highly recommend a particular Pure Land to best inspire us – Amitābha Buddha's (Amitufo) Western Pure Land Of Ultimate Bliss is the one.

All teachings of Śākyamuni Buddha are for guiding us to the True Happiness of Buddhahood. Among them, the Pure Land teachings are especially skilful and precious, as they will be the longest-lasting feasible path to liberation. Thus, among thousands of Buddhas mentioned, Amitufo is the one whom Śākyamuni Buddha spoke the most of. His name represents the immeasurable light of his great compassion and wisdom, and the immeasurable life of his great meritorious virtues, as manifested in his magnificent Pure Land. Interconnected with every other Pure Land, it is truly the finest representation of all Buddhas' focused compassion and wisdom.

Since most of us will yet to attain liberation by the end of this life, still being subject to rebirth, it makes perfect sense to seek the best place possible, to further our progress towards Buddhahood. In Amitufo's Pure Land, there are absolutely no distractions from this purpose, only with all kinds of superb expedient means for spiritual advancement in the swiftest ways possible. Unlimited time is also offered there, thus instantly transcending the otherwise indefinite rounds of rebirth. In terms of advantage, as Śākyamuni Buddha taught, even the most splendid worldly heavens cannot compare.

All will have the ideal principal (Buddha), teachers (great Bodhisattvas) and schoolmates (like-minded spiritual friends) in Pure Land, with whom they train blissfully, with no possibility of backsliding, having the guarantee of graduation as enlightened Bodhisattvas bound for Buddhahood. Anyone born there is free to come and go too, while staying connected to Amitufo's blessings until Buddhahood is attained.

It is a common mistake to imagine that this Pure Land might be 'too good' for efficient spiritual cultivation. If this is true, all Buddhas would be sabotaging us by recommending it, which cannot be the case! Conversely, if this saṃsāric realm is so conducive, why are we still so far from liberation? Being able to learn from all Buddhas and see all of Saṃsāra via Pure Land, it is the enlightened realm of the true Middle Way!

Amitufo's Pure Land is to be reached with the Three Provisions, of deep Faith and joyful Aspiration, as expressed through the wholehearted Practice of being mindful of his name. Although the most noble Aspiration is with Bodhicitta to save all beings, as long as one is not averse to this, Pure Land can still be reached, where it will be nurtured. Practice is best when Samādhi from connection to Amitufo is attained. However, even if this supreme Samādhi is yet to be experienced, it can be cultivated through sincere regular practice, and even when dying, as many cases attest. Of course, it is much wiser to fortify all Three Provisions now.

When mindful of Amitufo, be it in everyday life or when dying, this aligns our Buddha-nature with the great blessings of all Buddhas, cultivating our morality, concentration and wisdom at the same time. (Even the greatest Bodhisattvas on the brink of Buddhahood constantly practise mindfulness of Buddha, to be mindful of the goal to fully awaken their Buddha-nature

for becoming Buddhas.) Some classic signs of successful practice were exemplified by the illustrious Great Master Zhizhe, who was able to calmly announce his moment of departure for Pure Land. This state of mind transcends our usual three poisons of attachment (to saṃsāric life), aversion (to death) and delusion (of where one is going to). Such is remarkable proof of the great efficacy of Pure Land practice!

Due to the relative ease of the main practice of the Pure Land teachings and its advantages seemingly ‘too good’ to be true, Śākyamuni Buddha reiterated that the profound Pure Land teachings are actually ‘extremely difficult’ to have faith in. Yet, they must be taught to benefit many, including us. Precisely for this reason, Great Master Zhizhe wrote *The Treatise On Ten Doubts About Pure Land*. Although it might sound like a rebuttal against the Pure Land teachings, this cannot be further from the truth. In this renowned text, he ingeniously formulated ten very good questions, followed by even more brilliant answers, with extensive quoting from sūtras and treatises to strengthen our faith in Amitufo.

We sincerely hope you will appreciate this book, and benefit from our efforts to create a more definitive translation of this important text. We would be most grateful for any suggestions to further improve it. Queries on the Pure Land teachings are also welcomed, along with subscription requests for our free Pure Land newsletter. There is also a companion course with this book called *The Faith Factor*, that further illuminates upon this treatise. Do join us for the next run. As our final wish... May all swiftly reach Pure Land! Namo Amitufo!

Shen Shi'an, MA (Buddhist Studies)  
Chief Editor of TDE Team  
tde@thedailyenlightenment.com

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## 作者简介



智者大师（538 - 597年），也称智顓，是中国佛教天台宗四祖，天台宗的实际创始人。时人称之为东土小释迦。

他十八岁投湘州果愿寺法绪出家，二十三岁拜南岳慧思为师，修习禅法，证得法华三昧。

他依《妙法莲华经》立五时八教的判教理论。树立新的宗义，发扬一念三千，圆融三谛的思想，立一心三观，及止观双修的原则。

由智者大师所作，《净土十疑论》是净宗九祖蕩益大师选定在净土十要中的第四要。也是一本在净土法门黄金时代的照明论文。这本杰作不但延续广答关于净土法门的一般疑问，也巩固人们对它的信心。

## Brief Introduction Of Author

Great Master Zhizhe (538–597 CE), also named Zhiyi, is Chinese Buddhism's Tiantai Tradition's Fourth Patriarch, and its actual founder. He was also called the Eastern Land's (China) Little Śākya (muni Buddha) by those of his time.

He renounced to be a monk at the age of 18 in Xiangzhou's Guoyuan Monastery through Master Faxu. At 23, he became Master Nanyue Huisi's disciple, practised meditation and realised the Dharma Flower Samādhi.

He relied on the Wonderful Dharma Lotus Flower Sūtra to establish the Five Periods And Eight Teachings as a theoretical basis for classification of the Buddha's teachings. Setting up a new tradition's system, he developed the teachings of Three Thousand Worlds In A Single Thought, perspectives for perfect harmonisation of the Three Truths, One Mind With Three Contemplations, and principles for the dual cultivation of Stopping And Seeing.

Written by Great Master Zhizhe, The Treatise On Ten Doubts About Pure Land was chosen by the Pure Land Tradition's Ninth Patriarch Great Master Ouyi, as the fourth of ten essential Pure Land texts. Also an illuminating treatise composed in the Golden Age of the Pure Land tradition, this masterpiece not only continues to extensively answer common doubts about the Pure Land teachings, it also fortifies our faith in them.

除了《净土十疑论》，智者大师关于净土法门的著作包括《观无量寿佛经疏》、《阿弥陀经义记》、《五方便念佛门》等亦多偏赞净土。甚至《摩诃止观》述四种三昧，其中常行三昧，即是专持念阿弥陀佛之净土行。

智者大师六十岁入涅槃。临命终时，大师亦右西向，闻唱《法华》、《无量寿》二经，并赞劝往生弥陀净土。

大师往生前，则言「吾诸师友，今从观音势至，皆来迎我。」

Other than The Treatise On Ten Doubts About Pure Land, Great Master Zhizhe's works on the Pure Land teachings include the Commentary On The Sūtra Of Contemplation On The Buddha Of Immeasurable Life, Record On Meaning Of The Amitābha Sūtra, Five Expedient Means To Practise (The Dharma Door Of) Mindfulness Of Buddha, and many other works also particularly praising Pure Land. Even the Maha Stopping And Seeing states four kinds of samādhis, among which is Constant Movement Samādhi, a Pure Land practice to uphold focused mindfulness of Amituofo (Amitābha Buddha).

Great Master Zhizhe entered Parinirvāṇa at the age of 60. When approaching the end of life, the Great Master laid on his right and faced the West, reciting the Lotus Sūtra and the Immeasurable Life Sūtra, also praising and encouraging rebirth in Amituofo's Pure Land.

Before the Great Master took rebirth, he said, 'To all my teachers and friends, as of now, Guan(shi)yin (Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva) and (Da)shizhi (Mahāsthāmaprāpta Bodhisattva) are all here to welcome (and receive) me (for birth in Amituofo's Pure Land).'

第一疑：  
舍离众生疑

问曰：

「诸佛菩萨以大悲为业。若欲救度众生，只应愿生三界，于五浊三途中，救苦众生。」

因何求生净土，自安其身？舍离众生则是无大慈悲，专为自利障菩提道。」

# THE FIRST DOUBT: Doubt Of Forsaking Sentient Beings

## Question:

All Buddhas<sup>1</sup> and Bodhisattvas<sup>2</sup> accord with great compassion<sup>3</sup> for their actions. If desiring to save and deliver sentient beings, we should only aspire for birth in the three spheres,<sup>4</sup> within the five defilements<sup>5</sup> and three paths,<sup>6</sup> to save suffering sentient beings.

For what cause should we seek birth in [the] Pure Land<sup>7</sup> [of Amitā(bha) Buddha (Amituofo)], to personally abide in peace? Forsaking sentient beings is thus without great loving-kindness<sup>8</sup> and compassion, to focus on self-benefits that obstruct the Bodhi<sup>9</sup> path.

1 Buddha: An awakened or fully enlightened one, who has attained liberation from all suffering, having perfected compassion and wisdom with all other virtues, for guiding all sentient beings to the same goal.

2 Bodhisattva: One who aspires for Buddhahood, while guiding all sentient beings to it

3 Great compassion: Wish and action to remove suffering of all sentient beings

4 ... of desire, form and formlessness

5 ... of kalpa, views, afflictions, sentient beings and lifespans

6 Realms of hell-beings, hungry ghosts and animals

7 World created by a Buddha's perfect compassion, wisdom and merits (meritorious virtues) for swiftly guiding sentient beings to Buddhahood without fail

8 Wish for all sentient beings to be well and happy

9 Full awakening; supreme enlightenment; Buddhahood

答曰：

「菩萨有二种。

一者，久修行菩萨道，得无生忍者，实当所贵。

二者，未得已还及初发心凡夫。凡夫菩萨者，要须常不离佛。忍力成就，方堪处三界内，于恶世中，救苦众生。

故《智度论》云：『具缚凡夫，有大悲心，愿生恶世，救苦众生者，无有是处。』

何以故？恶世界烦恼强。自无忍力，心随境转，声色所缚。自堕三途，焉能救众生？

## Answer:

Bodhisattvas are of two kinds.

The first, for a long time, have cultivated the Bodhisattva path, and already attained the Patience Of Non-Birth.<sup>10</sup> Truly, they should be responsible [for saving suffering sentient beings].

The second, are those who have yet to attain it, and also ordinary beings, who have just given rise to Bodhicitta.<sup>11</sup> Ordinary Bodhisattvas need to constantly be with, and never leave Buddha[s]. When the power of patience is accomplished, then can they abide in the three spheres, within this evil period,<sup>12</sup> to save suffering sentient beings.

Thus, the Perfection Of Wisdom Treatise<sup>13</sup> says, 'For bound<sup>14</sup> ordinary beings, who have the mind of great compassion, and aspire for birth in this evil period, to save suffering sentient beings, this is not possible.

Why is this so? Afflictions of this evil period's world are powerful. Personally without the power of patience, the mind will, with conditions be transformed, thus by sounds and forms bound. Personally falling into the three paths, how is one able to save sentient beings?

10 Insight of the non-origination (and non-cessation) of dharmas (phenomena of mind and matter), that leads to non-retrogressible progress towards Buddhahood

11 Aspiration to attain Buddhahood while guiding all sentient beings to the same goal

12 ... with the five defilements (See Note 5 on Page 13)

13 Mahā Prajñā Pāramitā Śāstra 大智度论: Treatise On The Great Perfection Of Wisdom

14 ... by afflictions of thoughts, speech and actions with attachment, aversion and delusion that cause suffering

假令得生人中，圣道难得。或因施戒修福，得生人中，得作国王大臣，富贵自在。纵遇善知识，不肯信用。

贪迷放逸，广造众罪，乘此恶业，一入三途，经无量劫。从地狱出，受贫贱身。

若不逢善知识，还堕地狱。如此轮回，至于今日，人人皆如是。』此名难行道也。

故《维摩经》云：『自疾不能救，而能救诸疾人？』

If attaining birth within the human realm, the sagely path<sup>15</sup> is difficult to attain. One might, by generosity, upholding of precepts<sup>16</sup> and cultivation of blessings, attain birth within the human realm, to become a country's king or great official, with wealth, honour and ease. Even if one meets good-knowing friends,<sup>17</sup> one may not be willing to have faith in them, or benefit from them.

With greed and delusion unrestrained, extensively creating all kinds of transgressions,<sup>18</sup> riding on this evil karma,<sup>19</sup> once entering the three paths, passes through immeasurable kalpas.<sup>20</sup> Departing from the hells,<sup>21</sup> one receives a poor and lowly body.

If not coming across good-knowing friends, one will still fall into the hells. Thus reborn, so far as to this present day, everyone is like so.' This is named the Path Of Difficult Practice.<sup>22</sup>

Thus, the Vimalakīrti Sūtra<sup>23</sup> says, '[If your] personal sickness is not able to be relieved, how moreover, [are you] able to relieve all sick persons?'

15 ... to attainments towards/of liberation of self and/or others, relying only on Self-Power

16 ... of moral conduct to avoid evil (and do good)

17 Spiritual friends

18 Immoral misgivings

19 ... which leads to retribution of suffering

20 Kalpa: An inconceivably long period of time; one world cycle: time for a world to be formed and destroyed

21 Hell(s): Realm with greatest and longest suffering

22 ... due to many obstacles and recurring high tendency to backslide

23 Vimalakīrti Nirdeśa Sūtra 维摩诘所说经: Discourse On Teaching Spoken By Vimalakīrti

又《智度论》云：『譬如二人，各有亲眷，为水所溺。一人情急，直入水救。为无方便力故，彼此俱没。

一人有方便，往取船筏。乘之救接，悉皆得脱水溺之难。

新发意菩萨，亦复如是，未得忍力，不能救众生。为此常须近佛。得无生忍已，方能救众生，如得船者。』

又论云：『譬如婴儿，不得离母。若也离母，或堕坑井，渴乳而死。

又如鸟子，翅羽未成，只得依树傅枝，不能远去。翅翮成就，方能飞空，自在无碍。』

凡夫无力，唯得专念阿弥陀佛，使成三昧。以业成故，临终敛念得生，决定不疑，见弥陀佛。

Moreover, the Perfection Of Wisdom Treatise says, ‘For example, there are two persons, each having relatives, by waters being drowned. One person, feeling anxious, directly enters the water to save them. Due to being without the power of expedient means,<sup>24</sup> with one another, they all sink.

One other person has expedient means, and goes to get a boat. Riding on it to receive and save, all attain liberation from the adversity of being drowned by water.

Newly aspiring Bodhisattvas are likewise so, yet to attain the power of patience, and not able to save sentient beings. Due to this, they constantly need to be near Buddha[s]. After attaining the Patience Of Non-Birth, then are they able to save sentient beings, like the one who attained the boat.’

Moreover, the Treatise says, ‘For example, a baby should never leave the mother. If even the mother is left behind, the baby might fall into a pit or well, and die from thirst for milk.

Moreover, like a baby bird, with wings not yet developed, who can only lean on trees and stick to branches, he is not able to go far. With the feathers and quills accomplished, then is he able to fly to the sky, with ease and without obstructions.’

Ordinary beings without power, can only, with focused mindfulness of Amitā[bha] Buddha [Amitufo], enable accomplishment of Samādhi<sup>25</sup> With this karma thus accomplished, when approaching the end of life with gathered mindfulness, they will attain birth [in his Pure Land]. Definitely and without doubt, they will see Amitā[bha] Buddha [Amitufo].

24 Skilful methods from compassion and wisdom synergised

25 Right concentration from connecting to Amitā(bha) Buddha’s (Amitufo) blessings

证无生忍已，还来三界，乘无生忍船，救苦众生，广施佛事，任意自在。

故论云：『游戏地狱，行者生彼国，得无生忍已，还入生死国，教化地狱，救苦众生。』

以是因缘，求生净土，愿识其教。故《十住婆沙论》，名易行道也。」

After realising the Patience Of Non-Birth, they return to the three spheres, riding on the boat of Patience Of Non-Birth, to save suffering sentient beings, extensively practise generosity, and accomplish the Buddha's activities, at will and with ease.

Thus, the Treatise says, 'Travelling freely with ease in the hells, practitioners born in that [Pure] Land, after attaining the Patience Of Non-Birth, return to enter the lands of birth and death, for teaching and transforming hell-beings, to save [these and other] suffering sentient beings.'

With these causes and conditions, seek birth in [that] Pure Land [of Amitā(bha) Buddha (Amituofo)], and aspire to understand its teachings. Thus, the Ten Abodes Vibhāṣā Treatise<sup>26</sup> names this the Path Of Easy Practice.<sup>27</sup>

26 Daśa Bhūmika [Grounds] Vibhāṣā [Compendium] Śāstra 十住毘婆沙论

27 ... due to few obstacles and no tendency to backslide

For page 22-109,  
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# About The Translator & Editor

**Shen Shi'an 沈时安**

An independent Buddhist teacher, author, researcher, translator, editor and poet, he was one of the founding members of the Dharma Propagation Division of Kong Meng San Phor Kark See Monastery (Bright Hill Temple in Singapore) in 1997.

Holding a Masters of Arts degree in Buddhist Studies that covered all major Buddhist traditions, he served as a Dharma Trainer and Project Coordinator in its Community Development & Training Department until 2011, focusing on Buddhist research, writing, teaching and answering of media queries on Buddhism.

He was the founder of the temple's Youth Mission (now 'KMSPKS Youth'), a book purchaser for its Awareness Place project, and the Chief Editor of the Web & Library Department, that co-supported Buddhnet.net, a popular Buddhist education website.

He is the founder and editor of TheDailyEnlightenment.com since 1997, one of the world's largest independent Buddhist inspirational e-newsletters with over 31,000 members, the editor of 'Be a Lamp Upon Yourself', 'The Stonepeace Book (Volume 1-2)', 'Awaken: Gateway to Buddhism (CD-ROM)' and the writer-editor of 'The Daily Enlightenment: Reflections For Practising Buddhists (Book 1-7)' and the bestselling graphic novel, 'The Amazing & Amusing Adventures of Sam & Sara: The Zen of All Kinds of Stuff!'

He also contributes occasionally to magazines such as 'Nanyang Buddhist', 'Awaken' (for which he was Contributing Editor), 'For You (Information)', and 'Eastern Horizon'. He served with the film selection team of a Buddhist film festival, writes movie reviews for BuddhistChannel.tv, the world's

leading Buddhist news network, and popularised Dharma@ Cinema, which is an innovative way of sharing the Dharma through detailed reviews and discussions of both popular and offbeat films.

Using retranslated sūtras and treatise texts, he has taught on the Pure Land teachings at Singapore Buddhist Federation, Kong Meng San, Pu Ji Si Buddhist Research Centre and Poh Ming Tse. He also leads the Pureland Practice Fellowship.

He is also occasionally invited to conduct Dharma discussions for youths of tertiary institutions' Buddhist societies (NTUBS, NUSBS, SIMBB, NPBS, NYPBS) on various subjects, and to introduce Buddhist life perspectives at Secondary Schools (St. Patrick's School, Manjusri School), Junior Colleges (Catholic Junior College) and International Schools (UWCSEA, SJII).

He was also invited to share on Buddhism by Dharma Drum Mountain (Singapore), Fo Guang Shan (Singapore), Tai Pei Buddhist Centre, Singapore Buddhist Mission Youth, Singapore Buddhist Youth Mission, Wat Ananda Youth, Buddha of Medicine Welfare Society, The Buddhist Union, Buddhist Fellowship and Kampung Senang. He has also been invited to Indonesia and Malaysia to teach.

He was a committee member of the Inter-Religious Organisation, through which he served in interfaith harmony projects by writing and giving of public talks, having represented Buddhist points of view at national events held by NACLI, NHB, NHG, SAF, SPF, MHA, ACM, SPM, STB, OnePeople.sg, IRCC and MCYS.

He also co-runs Moonpointer.com, which is a community blog that promotes creative sharing of Buddhism via thousands of articles. He can be reached at [tde@thedailyenlightenment.com](mailto:tde@thedailyenlightenment.com) for invitations to share the Dharma via articles and talks.

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## Some Course Reviews

'Dharma Teacher Shen Shi'an is very sincere and earnest in delivery of his courses, always filled with many interesting and creative analogies to let us have better understanding of that taught. The various creative media used and the element of humour bring the classes alive, without any boredom, often allowing me to feel inspired and invigorated with renewed energy. Really appreciate the amount of effort Teacher Shi'an puts into preparing his classes. I hope that the work of Teacher Shi'an will continue to benefit more of us!' Amitufo, **Ricky**

'The "Understanding Amitufo" course has been immensely interesting. Shi'an has a knack for breaking down difficult concepts into accessible information, which we can easily relate to in everyday life. This course will be useful even for Pure Land practitioners who already know something about the teachings. Shi'an always explores new perspectives that surprise us. His humorous approach and use of clear, simple language is a major plus. There was never a dull moment. I enjoyed the classes tremendously!' Amitufo, **Wei Peng**

'Dear Brother Shi'an, "The Gift of Truth Excels All Other Gifts." Thank you for sharing the Pure Land Teachings with us. You have delivered the teachings in a very concise, interesting and creative manner. We enjoyed the lessons very much and have benefitted a lot from them. We are glad to have an excellent Dharma teacher like you in the Buddhist world. Sadhu! Sadhu! Sadhu! Amitufo!' With appreciation, **Tuck Khuen, Amy, Ivy, Doris & Joey**

'I am glad I made the effort to attend this class because the knowledge that I gained strengthened my faith in Amitufo and dispelled the doubts and misinformation that I was exposed to. I urge everyone to come with an open heart and mind to learn about Amitufo. It is the best gift for yourself!' With deep appreciation, **Karuna**

# THE Faith factor



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If all phenomena is  
'empty', why seek birth  
in Pure Land?

If there are so many  
Buddhas, why focus on  
Amitufofo?

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Homage To The Honourable Heavenly  
Dharma Protector Skanda (Wei Tuo) Bodhisattva



诸佛念念念众生，  
劝请诸众念念佛。

All Buddhas, who are mindful of all beings  
from thought to thought,  
urge and invite all beings to be mindful of Amitufofo  
from thought to thought.



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