

THE CONCEPT OF PREPARATIONS FOR DEATH IN PURE LAND BUDDHISM: A CASE STUDY OF THE GREAT PURE LAND MASTER THÍCH THIÊN TÂM

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ABSTRACT

All sentient beings were born to die. It is very difficult to know which day we will die and where we will be reborn after death. As ordinary beings, we cannot choose the place of birth, but we can choose for ourselves a peaceful death and determine in which one will be reborn after death according to the Buddha's teachings. In Mahāyāna Buddhism, Pure Land Buddhism is one of the most appropriate sects which can lead the practitioners to get out of samsāra in one lifetime through being born in the Pure Land of Amitābha Buddha. This documentary article is to study the concept of preparations for death to be reborn in the Sukhāvātī according to the great Master Thích Thiên Tâm's teaching and practice of Pure Land Buddhism. The findings show three main points that Pure Land practitioners should prepare to enhance their rebirth in the Pure Land. The first point is the practitioner should prepare the external conditions as well as spiritual preparation for his death while still in good health. The second one is about at the moment of death, it is necessary to invite good spiritual advisors and good Dhamma friends to remind and support the dying person in the recitation of the Amitabha Buddha's name. The last point is for the family and relatives of the dead person, they should know and follow the important tips to bring true benefits to the dead person. Thus, understanding the importance of preparing for the Eve of Death, the Pure Land practitioners can arrange the essential conditions for their death to be reborn in the Pure Land immediately after the body leaves this world.

Introduction

Death is one of eight sufferings,¹ which is taught by the Buddha in the first very sermon (*Dhammacakkappavattana Sūta*) after he achieved enlightenment. As far as we know that no one can escape death in this world; however, most people are still afraid of death. In fact, death is not so scary as people think, but because we attach too much to our loved ones, our properties, and whatever we think that is of us. Thus, we are afraid of losing what we have more than death. Thinking of death, the main difference between each person is he can choose for himself a peaceful death and determine where he will reborn after death or not. People who do not know Buddha-Dhamma, have no way to deal with this problem, and simply endure the process and be reborn according to their *kamma*. Those who understand and practice the Buddha-Dhamma well, they can prepare for their own death to be reborn in the good realms and liberate from *samsāra* as soon as possible. Among eighty-four thousand Buddha-Dhamma methods, Pure Land Buddhism is one of the most appropriate sects which can lead the practitioners to get out of *samsāra* in one lifetime according to Mahāyāna Buddhism.²

In Vietnamese Buddhism, Amitābha belief, or Pure Land Buddhism has been rooted strongly since early times. According to professor Lê Mạnh Thát, Buddhism was introduced to Vietnam in the 2nd to 3rd CE century.³ In the modern age, one of the two Great Pure Land Masters who reformed traditional Pure Land in Vietnam into an official sect is Master Thích Thiên Tâm.⁴ He, specialized in teaching and practice of Pure Land in Vietnam, is being recognized as a realized master and successfully born Pure Land in the modern age. For more than half of his monastic life, he was in isolated retreat to practice, translate and write books until the end of his life. His life and works greatly contributed to Vietnamese Buddhism in general and to Pure Land tradition in special. He also worked tirelessly for the Vietnamese Buddhist Sangha and educated young monks and nuns for future Buddhism in the nation.⁵

Master Thích Thiên Tâm's way of practice and teaching contents in the book: "Niệm Phật Thập Yếu - "The Ten Essential Points of Amitabha's recitation" or known as in another name: "Buddhism of Wisdom and Faith: Pure Land Principles and Practices" which is very important for Vietnamese Pure Land practitioners. Though the work has a special value for Pure Land in Vietnam, it has not yet been recognized as a textbook to be based on

¹ There are eight types of suffering are mentioned in Buddhism, namely: birth, aging, illness, death, union with what is displeasing, separation from what is pleasing, not to get what one wants, and the five aggregates subject to clinging.

² Patriarch Yin Kuang, **Pure-Land Zen, Zen Pure-Land: Letters from Patriarch Yin Kuang**, Thích Thiên Tâm (trans.), (Taiwan: The Corporate Body of the Buddha Educational Foundation, 2003), p. 5.

³ Lê Mạnh Thát, **History of Buddhism in Vietnam from the Beginning to Lý Nam Đế's Dynasty**, vol 1, (Vietnamese ver.), (HCM City: Ho Chi Minh City General Press, 2006), pp. 19-26.

⁴ The other is the Great Master Thích Trí Tịnh.

⁵ Ibid. p. 421.

as the standard guideline for the official sect. The popularity of Pure Land has got increasing but more practitioners practicing improperly. Hence, the desired results are not gained as the method designation. To solve partly this problem, the contribution of “*The Ten Essential Points of Amitabha’s recitation*” should be carefully examined in its way of practice and teaching to Pure Land Buddhism in Vietnam so that the sect establishes its theoretical and practical foundations and its followers has a proper way to follow. Especially, in the last part of the book, Master Thích Thiện Tâm emphasized the importance of preparation for the death of Pure Land practitioners because it will affect or precisely determine the practitioner's rebirth in the Pure Land.

This article, therefore, opts for the title “The Concept of Preparations for Death in Pure Land Buddhism: A Case Study of the Great Pure Land Master Thích Thiện Tâm” in order to standardize his method applied for Vietnamese Pure Land Buddhism.

The Concept of Preparations for Death in Pure Land Buddhism Based on the Great Pure Land Master Thích Thiện Tâm’s Teaching and Practice

In Buddhism, there are four kinds of *kamma* with respect to the order in which the effect of *kamma* takes place, namely - *Garukamma* (heavy weighty *kamma*), *Āciṇṇakamma* (habitual *kamma*), *Kaṭattakamma* (Cumulative *kamma*), and *Āsannakamma* (death-proximate *kamma*).⁶ Among those four *kamma*, *Āsannakamma* is that a person does or remembers immediately before the moment of dying, plays a part in determining the future rebirth.⁷ If this is absent, a habitual *kamma* will be presented to him. Hence every Buddhist practitioner should be prepared for death because it can happen at any time. Especially, in Pure Land Buddhism, the practitioner should carefully prepare for death for the reason that it directly determines the capability of rebirth in the Sukhāvātī (the Pure Land of Amitābha Buddha). This is based on the Buddha’s teachings in the Pure Land Sūtras.⁸ And the most important teaching in Pure Land Buddhism, is the eighteenth vow of Amitābha Buddha⁹ in the Larger Sukhāvativyūha-Sūtra (the Infinite Lifespan Sūtra) that it is said by the eminent monks.¹⁰ The main core of the eighteenth vow is wishing to be reborn in Sukhāvātī with a sincere mind and

⁶ Bhikkhu Bodhi, **A Comprehensive Manual of Abhidhamma: The Abhidhmattha Sangaha of Ācariya Anuruddha**, Allan R. Bomhard (revised and ed.), (Charleston Buddhist Fellowship, 2007), p. 176.

⁷ Narada Maha Thera, **A Manual of Abhidhamma - Abhidhmattha Sangaha**, (Malaysia: Buddhist Missionary Society, 1987), p. 295.

⁸ There are three most important Sūtras recognized as three deputations of Pure Land Buddhism. These are the smaller Sukhāvativyūha-sūtra (Amitābha Sūtra), the larger Sukhāvativyūha-sūtras (Infinite Lifespan Sūtra), and the Amitāyurdhyāna-sutra (The Visualization of the Buddha of Infinite Lifespan Sūtra or the Meditation Sūtra).

⁹ The eighteenth vow of Amitābha Buddha: “If, when I attain Buddhahood, the sentient beings of the ten quarters who, with sincere and entrusting heart, aspire to be born in my land and say my name even ten times, should not be born there, may I not attain the perfect enlightenment. Excluded are those who commit the five grave offenses⁹ and those who slander the right Dhamma”.

¹⁰ Venerable Master Chin-Kung, **The Essence of the Infinite Life Sutra**, the Pure Land Translation Team (trans.), (Australia: Pure Land Learning College Association, 2013), p. 8.

mindful reciting of “Amitābha Buddha” even ten times in order to all other wandering thoughts go away at the end of one’s life, one can be reborn in the Pure Land.¹¹

Thus, the Pure Land practitioners should clearly understand the essential conditions of rebirth in the Pure Land, is how to recite or remember the Amitābha Buddha’s name even ten times at the time of death with a concentrated and undistracted mind and aspire to be born in Amitābha Buddha’s land with an earnest mind. However, it is not easy to be mindful to recite Amitābha Buddha’s name for a dying one if one does not prepare oneself for death. Thus, preparation for death is extremely important in Pure Land Buddhism and general Buddhism as well.

According to the great master Thích Thiên Tâm’s teachings, there are three important points of preparation for death to support one’s rebirth in Sukhāvātī, as follows:

1) Required Preparations on the Eve of Death Preparation of External Conditions

Death is a reality; everyone must die if one is still reborn in the wheel of life by one’s own kamma, so it is better to accept it rather than fear and denial it. Thus, seeing other’s death, and realizing our coming turn. Especially, people who practice Pure Land Dhamma and wish to be reborn in the Pure Land in one lifetime, should keep in their mind to prepare for death while still in good health, in order to ensure their rebirth in the Pure Land instead of spending time to be worried and scare of death. This is because the Buddha says that it is impossible to obtain rebirth in the Pure Land with few virtuous roots or meritorious causes and conditions.¹² Preparation for death means that practitioners are creating good conditions for their rebirth. Master Thích Thiên Tâm emphasized two things that Pure Land practitioners need to prepare for external conditions.

Firstly, Pure Land practitioners should seek spiritual friends, especially those people who also practice Pure Land Dhamma, to support each other when they are seriously ill and at the time of death. Furthermore, the practitioners should encourage their beloved ones to practice Buddha Recitation so that they create merits and good conditions for themselves in the future, exactly that is the time of death. Without the assistance of others, it is very difficult to be reborn in the Pure Land in one lifetime.

Secondly, the practitioners should settle down all their worldly affairs, so that they will not be preoccupied at the time of death. If the practitioner is a layperson, he should appropriately divide his wealth and property in, and arrange all conditions in advance.

¹¹ J.C Cleary, **Pure Land Pure Mind**, (Taiwan: The Corporate Body of the Buddha Education Foundation, 1994), p. 5.

¹² 阿彌陀經 [Amitābha Sutta], Venerable Yifa and Petter M.R (trans.), Taishō vol 12. No. 0366, (Taiwan: Sutra Translation and Research Center, 2007), p. 17.

Especially, Pure Land practitioners should instruct their family and relatives, do not to cry or show sadness when the practitioner is seriously ill or dying.

Spiritual Preparations

The practitioner should have a transcendental bent of mind, realizing that wealth and property, as well as family, relatives, and friends, are all illusory conditions. Relying in life on an illusory realm, he will die empty-handed. If he fails to understand this truth, family and possessions will certainly impede his liberation.

Elder Master Tzu Chao once said: “The Pure Land practitioner on the verge of death usually faces Three Points of Doubt and Four Narrow Passes which obstruct his rebirth in the Pure Land. He should be prepared, reflecting on them in advance to eliminate them.”

The Three Points of Doubt¹³ are:

(1) Fearing that his past karma is heavy and his period of cultivation short and that therefore, he may not achieve rebirth in the Pure Land; Amitabha Buddha is renowned for his Eighteenth Vow: not to attain Buddhahood unless sentient beings who sincerely desire to be reborn in the Pure Land, and who recite “Amitābha Buddha” with the one-pointedness mind, are reborn there. Ten utterances or thoughts represent a very short cultivation period, yet the practitioner can still achieve rebirth in the Pure Land.¹⁴

(2) Fearing that he has not yet fulfilled his vows and obligations or severed greed, anger, and delusion; therefore, he may not achieve rebirth in the Pure Land; The *Questions of King Milinda Sutra* describes that: “A minute grain of sand dropped on the surface of the water, will sink immediately. On the other hand, a block of stone, large and heavy, can easily be moved from place to place by boat.”¹⁵

(3) Fearing that even though he has recited the Buddha's name, Buddha Amitabha may not come and that therefore, he may not achieve rebirth in the Pure Land. What is most important at the time of death is to recite the Buddha's name in all earnestness and not worry about anything else. Any doubts at that time will give rise to obstructions and impediments.

¹³ Master Thích Thiên Tâm, **Buddhism of Wisdom and Faith**, p. 279.

¹⁴ *Meditation Sutra* teaches: “If anyone who has committed the Five Grave Offenses or Ten Evil Deeds sees an evil omen appear as he is on the verge of death, he needs only recite the Buddha's name one to ten times with all his heart and Buddha Amitabha will descend to welcome and escort him back to the Pure Land.” 觀無量壽佛經 [The Meditation on the Buddha Infinite Life Sūtra]. Taishō Tripitaka. CBETA, vol T12, no. 0365.

¹⁵ The huge block of stone represents the weight of heavy karma, the boat symbolizes the power of Amitabha Buddha's Vows. Therefore, the cultivator should not think that residual greed, anger, and delusion will prevent him from achieving rebirth in the Pure Land.

The four Narrow Passes ¹⁶are:

(1) Because of suffering due to illness, he may come to malign the Buddhas as ineffective and unresponsive.

(2) Because of love attachment, he may chain himself to his family, unable to let go

(3) Killing animals to offer Gods

(4) Alcohol and blood smell

Once Pure Land practitioners have any doubts about Pure Land teachings, they should try to think and find solutions to overcome their doubts. Because faith and vows are two main preconditions to deciding the practitioner's rebirth in Sukhāvātī. For example, those who doubt their rebirth, should not worry about not attaining rebirth in Sukhāvātī because of past heavy kamma or short cultivation period. In the eighteenth vow of Amitābha Buddha, he promises that practitioners who sincerely and joyfully entrust themselves to Amitābha's deliverance, desire to be reborn in Sukhāvātī, and singlemindedly recite his name even ten times, are reborn there.¹⁷ Ten times represent a very short cultivated time, but the practitioner can still attain rebirth in Sukhāvātī. Even people who have committed the five grave offenses or ten evil deeds, will also be reborn in Sukhāvātī if they can meet a good spiritual advisor, who will teach them to recite the Amitābha Buddha's name ten utterances with utmost sincerity at the time of death.

In short, at the time of death, the practitioners should not worry about whether they have witnessed auspicious omens or not. They should just concentrate on reciting the Amitābha Buddha's name with all earnestness until the very end. On the way practicing the Pure Land Dhamma, the practitioner should think and clearly recall these things to prepare themselves in advance. Their mind will then be calm and undisturbed at the moment of death.

2) Critical Importance of the Moment of Death

As far as we know that death-proximate kamma is extremely important to determine where one will be reborn in the next life. Sometimes a bad person may die with a peaceful state of mind and receive a good rebirth if he remembers a good deed what he has done or does a good act at the last moment; and conversely, if a good person dwells on an evil deed done earlier, or does an evil deed just before dying, he may undergo a misery rebirth. Therefore, in Buddhism, it is really important and necessary to remind a dying person of his good deeds or guide him to think good deeds throughout the last moments of his life.

In Pure Land Buddhism, the Buddha and the ancient patriarchs encourage the practitioner should recite the Amitābha Buddha's name in daily life to liberate from *samsāra*

¹⁶ Ibid, p. 279 -280.

¹⁷ Hisao Inagaki (trans.) & Harold Stewart (in collaboration), *The Three Pure Land Sutras* (2nd eds.), (California: Numata Center for Buddhist Translation and Research, 2003), p. 14.

through being born in Sukhāvātī according to the forty-eight vows of Amitābha Buddha. The most important condition to be reborn in Sukhāvātī is the dying one can recite the name of Amitābha Buddha even ten times. If the patient is really weak, cannot recite Amitābha Buddha's name, but he can hear Amitābha Buddha's name and desire to be reborn in Sukhāvātī, so thus, he may be reborn in there. This emphasizes the importance of others' supportive power to one's rebirth at the moment of death. In this part of the research, the author would like to focus on the assistance from spiritual advisors and the supportive recitation of Amitābha Buddha's name from Pure Land Dhamma friends to the dying one.

Seeking Guidance from Spiritual Advisors

According to the Meditation Sūtra, even ordinary beings- evildoers who commit the five grave offenses and the ten evil deeds, which would bring them to fall into evil realms and suffer endless agony for many *kalpas*, they will be reborn in the Pure Land of Amitābha Buddha in the lowest level of the lowest grade. If, at the time of death, they can meet a good spiritual advisor, who will teach them to recite the Amitābha Buddha's name ten utterances with utmost sincerity.¹⁸ Here, this is not easy to do and is very rare to happen at the time of death. It only occurs when there is the spiritual advisor's help or supportive recitation. Those who, at the time of death, encounter a good spiritual advisor and accomplish ten utterances, must have created good kamma in the past. Otherwise, one could not even meet a good spiritual advisor, let alone accomplish ten pure recitations.¹⁹

Moreover, in the Sūtra of the Past Vows of Earth Store Bodhisattva, Earth Store Bodhisattva said to an elder named Great Eloquence that if beings of the present and future when on the verge of dying, hear the name of one Buddha, one Bodhisattva, or one Pratyekabuddha, they will attain liberation whether they have committed offenses or not.²⁰ One more time, we can see how much important of hearing the name of the Buddha at the moment of dying the patient.

Thus, seeking good spiritual advisors to remind recitation of Amitābha Buddha's name at the time of death is very necessary for one's rebirth in Sukhāvātī.

The spiritual advisor should follow the guidelines set out below²¹:

(1) Remind the patient of the sufferings of the *Saha* World and the joys of the Pure Land, so that he may develop a mind of devotion and attraction to the Pure Land. The

¹⁸ Ibid., p. 85.

¹⁹ Patriarch Chih I and Master T'ien Ju, *Tịnh Độ Thập Nghi Luận - Pure Land Buddhism: Dialogs with Ancient Masters*, Vietnamese version of Master Thích Thiên Tâm and translated into English by Sutra Translation Committee of the United States & Canada, (Taiwan: The Corporate Body of the Buddha Education Foundation, 1992), p. 41.

²⁰ *Kinh Địa Tạng Bồ Đề Nguyên [Sūtra of the Past Vows of Earth Store Bodhisattva]*, Venerable Thích Trí Tịnh (trans.), Vietnamese version, (Taiwan: The Corporate Body of the Buddha Education Foundation, 2015), p. 94.

²¹ Thích Thiên Tâm, *Buddhism of Wisdom and Faith*, pp. 283-284.

spiritual advisor should also enumerate and praise the good deeds, merits, and virtues of the patient. Because this doing can help the patient to be happy and free of doubts, certain that when the time of death comes, he or she will be reborn in the Pure Land thanks to his or her good deeds, vows, and practices.

(2) If the patient has any doubts, the advisor should, depending on the circumstances, explain the Three Points of Doubt and the Four Narrow Passes discussed earlier. And it is important to remind the dying person to cease thinking of wealth and property, as well as attachment to family and friends.²²

(3) If the patient has a will, so much the better, otherwise, the advisor should counsel against all inquiries in this regard. And it is should not talk about the nonsense that makes the patient attached to this Saha world and afraid of rebirth. Moreover, the advisor can also advise everyone to refrain from gossip and distracting conversations as they could rekindle the patient's attachment to this world, which is detrimental to the patient's desired rebirth.²³

(4) When relatives and friends come to visit, they should be discouraged from standing before the patient, inquiring about his health in a sad, piteous way. If the visitors would like to help, they can stand to the side and recite "Amitābha Buddha" aloud. Explain to the visitors that crying at this time could distract the patient from the vowing rebirth in the Pure Land, and result in the patient being subjected to much suffering.

(5) The patient should be counseled to practice charity and give away his personal effects to the needy.

Conducting "Supportive Recitation"

Master Shin-dao said that the recitation of the Amitābha Buddha's name, as a skillful means for saving all sentient beings, is the teaching suitable for this period of the decline of the *Dhamma*. With Pure Land Dhamma, of ten thousand who practice, ten thousand people reach the Pure Land.²⁴ Though, in the sutra, the Buddha taught that practitioners have to achieve Samādhi Recitation Buddha, if, at the time of one's death, there is supportive recitation, carefully practiced by the others, one can also be reborn in the Pure Land. For this reason, seeking the supportive recitation group, at the moment of death, is really necessary to help the dying one to be reborn in the Land of Amitābha Buddha as his wish.

Especially, family members and relatives of a dying patient have an important affection for the dying patient's rebirth. They should remain calm, without crying or lamenting, from the time he becomes gravely ill until their last moments. At this time, the

²² Shi Wuling, **In One Lifetime: Pure Land Buddhism**, (Chicago: Amitabha Publications, 2006), p. 52.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Patriarch Chih I and Master T'ien Ju, **Tĩnh Độ Thập Nghị Luận - Pure Land Buddhism Dialogs with Ancient Masters**, p. 54.

most important thing is to practice supportive recitation. When a patient on the verge of death wishes to bathe, dress in different garments, or change his position or sleeping quarters, practitioners may comply, while exercising caution and acting in a gentle, careful manner at all times. If the patient refuses or cannot give his consent because he has become mute, practitioners certainly should not go against his wishes.²⁵ At the time of death, the cultivator himself should either lie down or sit up, according to what comes naturally, without forcing himself. Supportive recitation by family members or Dhamma friends is the most necessary when a patient is on the verge of death. This is because, at that time, the patient is weak in body and mental mind and no longer in control of himself. For those who have not practiced reciting the Amitābha Buddha's name in daily life, it is very difficult to recite "Amitābha Buddha" ten times at the moment of death. Even individuals who have often recited the Buddha's name is also difficult to do it in wholeheartedly if there is no supportive recitation. Thus, the supportive recitation, at the time of death, will increase the capability of rebirth in the Pure Land for the patient.

Such recitation should closely follow the guidelines set out below²⁶.

(1) Respectfully place a standing Amitabha Buddha statue in front of the patient, so that he can see it clearly.

(2) Those who come to practice supportive recitation should take turns ... It should be remembered that the patient, in his dying state, requires a lot of fresh air to breathe. If the crowded people come and go or assistant recitation, the patient may have hard breathing, this will lead to be more harm than benefit. Thus, participants should be divided into many small groups and take turns reciting, so that the participants can

(3) Recitation should not be too loud or too low, too slow, or too fast. Each utterance should be clear and distinct so that it can pass through the ear and penetrate deep into the patient's *Alaya* consciousness.

(4) Regarding percussion instruments, practitioners should adapt to the circumstances and not be inflexible.

3) Helping After Death

When a person has just died, the most crucial thing is not to rush to move him. Even if the dead person is soiled with excrement and urine on his body, we should not be rushed to clean it. Practitioners should wait for eight hours, or at least three hours before taking a bath and changing their clothes. Relatives should not cry and wail immediately before and after the actual death. Because crying is not only useless, but it can also be

²⁵ There are also cases of individuals who might have achieved rebirth in the higher realms. However, out of ignorance, others made them suffer physically (by rearranging the positions of their hands and feet, for instance), making them irritated and angry.

²⁶ Master Thích Thiên Tâm, *Buddhism of Wisdom and Faith*, pp. 287-288.

harmful, as this can cause the deceased to develop thoughts of attachment, which may prevent him from achieving liberation.

To be of true benefit to the patient, practitioners should concentrate on reciting the Buddha's name in all earnestness, without crying until at least eight hours have passed. Why is this necessary? It is because although the patient has stopped breathing, his *Alaya* consciousness has not yet left his body. If, during this period, practitioners move the body, clean it, change its clothes, or lament, the deceased may still experience feelings of pain, sadness, anger, or self-pity, and descend upon the Evil Paths. This is a crucial point - a critical one - that relatives should note and remember as well.

After that, the body should be left alone, free of all disturbances, for another five hours (or a total of eight hours), at which time it can be bathed and given a change of clothing. If, during the entire eight-hour period, someone, or a group of persons, can remain near the deceased reciting the Buddha's name, so much the better. Except for recitation, nothing should be done. A reminder and caveat: during this period, the "deceased" may still have consciousness and feelings. After the eight-hours period, if the limbs have grown stiff and cannot move, practitioners should put a towel soaked in hot water around the joints. After a while, the body can be repositioned. The practice of touching the body of the deceased to locate the last warm spot should not be inflexible.²⁷

Funeral arrangements should be kept simple, not accompanied by superfluous ceremonies occasioning unnecessary expenses. Another caveat: only vegetarian food should be served. No non-vegetarian food should be provided as offerings or to entertain guests - for to take life is to sadden the departed with more karmic obstructions and "heavy baggage," making his liberation that much more difficult. Even if he has already been reborn in the Pure Land, his grade of rebirth may be lower as a result.

Conclusion

When being reborn in *samsāra* we still suffer again and again. Death is definite, but the time of death is indefinite; however, people say that "death is not the end of everything, but a gateway into another life". Luckily and happily, when we were born as human beings who have the highest capability to attain enlightenment, we should realize sufferings in this mundane life and choose the simplest way to liberate ourselves from *samsāra* as soon as possible. By being born in the Pure Land of Amitābha Buddha, we never fall into the three evil realms; in conversely, we have a good opportunity to change ordinary beings into saints and to attain the highest enlightenment beyond the cycle of birth and death. Then we can turn back this mundane world to save other beings. This is the ultimate

²⁷ Some of the texts in which this practice is mentioned include the *Great Heap Sutra*, the *Tibetan Book of the Dead*, and a well-known Chinese commentary, *Transcending Life and Death*. Note: this practice is particularly prevalent in Tantric (Esoteric) Buddhism.

bodhicitta that also is the ultimate intention of the Buddhas.²⁸ Thus, one of the most important tips to be reborn in the Pure Land is the practitioner must prepare for death. All tips of preparing for death in this article are taken from many Pure Land *sūtras* and books, mixed with Master Thích Thiên Tâm experience of recitation practice.²⁹

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²⁸ The ultimate intention of the Buddhas is for all sentient beings to escape the cycle of birth and death and to become enlightened, as they are.

²⁹ Thích Thiên Tâm, **Buddhism of Wisdom and Faith**, p. 28-35.

That, Le Manh. **History of Buddhism in Vietnam from the Beginning to Lý Nam Đế's Dynasty.** vol 1. (Vietnamese ver.). HCM City: Ho Chi Minh City General Press, 2006.

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