



**STUDYING THE PATH
WITH GUANYIN BODHISATTVA**

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Today marks the sacred birthday of Guanyin Bodhisattva. In the past few days, devotees from all places have flocked to temples to offer incense and pay homage to Buddhas and bodhisattvas. Xiyuan Temple, for example, has been packed with people, with the scent of incense permeating the air. I believe everyone can feel this “enthusiastic” atmosphere upon entering the temple. People in the Jiangnan region enjoy burning a large quantity of incense, with some even stacking hundreds of incense boxes into towering piles. However, this focus on quantity over quality often leads to heavy smoke and overpowering smells, without considering whether the

bodhisattvas would appreciate such burnings.

This is not the correct way to commemorate the occasion. Excessive incense burning fills the temple with smoke, which severely pollutes the air and troubles the monks who live there. Furthermore, discarded incense packaging, some of which even bear images and names of Buddhas and bodhisattvas, is flying everywhere. Apart from such littering's environmental impact, is this "burn the incense, throw the bag" behavior meant to seek blessing or to create negative karma? Rather than expressing devotion, such behavior only reflects ignorance about Buddhist teachings. Behind it lies a strong sense of attachment and desire that stem from an unenlightened mind rather than a pure and clean one. This mode of celebration neither resonates with Buddhas and bodhisattvas, nor promotes personal growth, and even risks giving outsiders the impression that Buddhism is merely superstitious. Clearly, there are issues that need to be addressed.

So, on exceptional days like this, how exactly should

followers express their devotion? How can temples arrange events that align with the Dharma to guide the public towards establishing the right faith, remembering the Three Jewels, and emulating the virtuous? To accomplish these goals, we must first understand why we believe in Buddhas and bodhisattvas.

Embracing Buddhism is not about seeking external support, but rather adopting Buddhas and bodhisattvas as role models to learn from. Therefore, the most meaningful way to commemorate Guanyin is not through superficial offerings, but by understanding his aspirations, practices, and virtues, adhering to his teachings, acquiring his perfected qualities, and ultimately becoming Guanyin.

These embody not only the true intention of the Bodhisattva but also the very reason for the Buddha's appearance in this world.

In Buddhism, there are many bodhisattvas, and the four most familiar ones are Guanyin, Manjushri, Ksitigarbha,

and Samantabhadra. Each represents a distinct virtue they have attained: Guanyin embodies great compassion, Manjushri great wisdom, Ksitigarbha great vows, and Samantabhadra great conduct. However, this does not mean Guanyin only possesses great compassion at the expense of other qualities. Rather, great compassion is his most notable attribute, and he skillfully employs various methods to guide sentient beings towards cultivating it. The same is true for the other bodhisattvas.

Yet, how do we learn the practices and teachings of bodhisattvas? Many people today see reciting sutras as the main way to study Buddhism, but have we ever considered for whom we are reciting these sutras? Are we doing it for Buddhas and bodhisattvas? But they do not need to hear our recitations. Or, if we are reciting sutras for ourselves, what is then the underlying significance?

In reality, the real purpose of reciting sutras is to understand the teachings, methods, and principles they articulate, so we can follow them as guidance in our spiritual

cultivation. If we treat sutra recitation merely as an obligation and do it absentmindedly, while it might plant some seeds of merit, its benefit is truly trivial compared to the profound insights contained in the sutras. Thus, we need to understand the deeper meanings behind practices like reciting sutras, offering incense, and venerating the Buddha. In doing so, we can transform our commemoration of the Buddha and bodhisattvas into actions that have real and practical significance in our cultivation.

“A thousand streams, with water flowing by, mirror a thousand reflections of the moon; Countless miles of azure, where no clouds lie, unveil countless miles of the majestic sky.” Why can the water reflect the moon? Because the water is pure. Similarly, it takes a pure heart to resonate and connect with Buddhas and bodhisattvas. Many of us believe in Guanyin, but we must ask ourselves: How well do we truly know about him? Do our actions align with his? If we do not know him well or our actions do not align, and we merely pray for our personal blessings, we risk falling into blind faith and superstition.

How do we connect with Buddhas and bodhisattvas? First, we need to be devout, as this is the foundation for attaining a pure heart. If our prayers are intermingled with intense worldly desire, they become impure and can no longer cleanse our minds. Furthermore, it is crucial to understand the reasons why Buddhas and bodhisattvas appeared in our world. The Buddha came to this world to awaken all sentient beings to his wisdom, guide them along the path he took, and help them to realize the same enlightenment.

Upon attaining enlightenment beneath the bodhi tree, the Buddha saw that all sentient beings possess the wisdom and virtue of the Tathagata and have the potential to reach Buddhahood. This potential is an infinite treasure within life itself. Yet, due to ignorance, sentient beings remain unaware of this treasure, thus living in deprivation like beggars. After reaching enlightenment, the Buddha spent 45 years teaching, aiming to help us uncover this treasure. This is the central focus of Buddhism. Although Buddhas and bodhisattvas show great compassion and

can safeguard sentient beings, their blessings are external forces that do not bring lasting solutions. Even if we possess great wealth and high status, their impact on life is only transitory. In fact, they could even foster negative actions. Therefore, the essence of learning Buddhism lies in the inner transformation of our lives, rather than external blessings.

In today's lecture, which honors the sacred birth of Guanyin, we will together learn about his origin, sacred name, Dharma Gate (methods of practice), and the significance of chanting his sacred name. Only by knowing Guanyin's aspirations, virtues, and the true purpose of his appearance in our world, can we genuinely learn from this Bodhisattva, align our actions with his teachings, and cultivate his qualities. This is the most meaningful way to commemorate Guanyin.

I

THE ORIGIN OF GUANYIN BODHISATTVA

Guanyin has a profound connection with China and is widely embraced by Chinese people. The saying “every household reveres Guanyin” attests to the devotion and faith people hold for him. In every Chinese community around the world, there are individuals who believe in, worship, and chant the name of Guanyin. In fact, many are more familiar with Guanyin than with Shakyamuni Buddha. However, despite recognizing various depictions of Guanyin and acknowledging his great compassion and commitment to helping those in distress, people often know very little about his origin. Was he a disciple

of the Buddha, like Venerable Kasyapa and Venerable Ananda?

Bodhisattvas typically refer to individuals who have begun practicing bodhicitta, but have not yet reached Buddhahood. Even after realizing emptiness, bodhisattvas from the first to the tenth stage, all have their own practices to perfect. So, does Guanyin fall into the same category as these bodhisattvas? Not quite. Guanyin, in fact, attained Buddhahood countless kalpas ago, but appears as a bodhisattva in Mahayana scriptures, alongside other great bodhisattvas such as Manjushri, Ksitigarbha, and Samantabhadra. They were all introduced to us by Shakyamuni Buddha when he was teaching the Mahayana scriptures, and were not disciples from India at the Buddha's time.

1. The Account in *Thousand-Handed and Thousand-Eyed Guanyin Bodhisattva's Vast, Perfect, Unimpeded, Great-Compassionate Heart Dharani Sutra*

The *Thousand-Handed and Thousand-Eyed Guanyin Bodhisattva's Vast, Perfect, Unimpeded, Great-Compassionate Heart Dharani Sutra* narrates the origins of Guanyin and contains the well-known *Nilakantha Dharani*, the *Great Compassion Mantra/Dharani*. The sutra writes:

Thus I have heard, once Shakyamuni Buddha was at Potalaka Mountain, in the treasure-adorned Guanyin's palace, sitting on a precious Lion-Throne adorned in purity with countless multifarious jewels... At that time, the Tathagata, who was sitting on his throne, intending to explain a teaching of the Total-Retention Dharani... At that time in the congregation, Guanyin Bodhisattva secretly emitted his sacrosanct light, thereupon, the worlds in the ten directions, along with this three-thousand-great-thousand worlds system, were all illuminated and became golden.

Upon demonstrating his supernatural powers, Guanyin explained the origin of the *Great Compassion Dharani* to the countless Bodhisattva Mahasattvas, great sravakas, heavenly beings, and others that were present. "Countless

billions of kalpas ago, a Buddha, whose name was Thousand Rays King Stillness Tathagata, appeared in the world. Because of his mercy towards all living beings, that Buddha, the World Honored One, spoke particularly to Guanyin this *Vast, Perfect, Unimpeded, Great Compassionate Heart Dharani*. He also predicted Guanyin's future attainment of Buddhahood, urging, 'You should hold this heart-dharani to give great benefit and happiness to all living beings in the future evil age.' After hearing the *Great Compassionate Dharani*, Guanyin immediately advanced from the first to the eighth Bhumi (stage of bodhisattva), vowing to use this mantra to comfort and benefit all sentient beings." Subsequently, Guanyin taught the assembly on the *Great Compassion Dharani*, its recitation methods, and its associated merits.

After listening to the profound teaching of the Dharma, Venerable Ananda, foremost in hearing and remembering the Buddha's teachings, asked Shakyamuni Buddha about Guanyin Bodhisattva's origins. The Buddha replied to Ananda:

This Guanyin Bodhisattva has unimaginable mighty and holy powers. Uncountable kalpas before, he had already been a Buddha named True Dharma Brightness Tathagata. Because of the power of his great compassionate vows, and in order to call upon all bodhisattvas to comfort and enlighten all living beings, he appears as a bodhisattva.

Thus, achieving Buddhahood does not mean retirement but rather an ongoing commitment to benefit all sentient beings across the ten Dharma Realms, particularly in the Saha World.

“Saha,” translating to “enduring,” accurately defines our world, as it is fraught with both natural disasters and human-caused catastrophes. People grapple with heavy afflictions, and the uncertainty of life and death is ever-present. These conditions are outlined in the sutras as the Five Turbidities of the Evil Age: Turbidity of the Age, Turbidity of Views, Turbidity of Afflictions, Turbidity of Sentient Beings, and Turbidity of the Lifespan. Witnessing the immense suffering of sentient beings,

Guanyin, propelled by great compassion, returns to this world. He appears in the form of a bodhisattva and vows to liberate all beings in this realm.

2. The Account in the *Secret Dharma Sutra of a Thousand Radiating Eyes of Guanyin Bodhisattva*

In the *Secret Dharma Sutra of a Thousand Radiating Eyes of Guanyin Bodhisattva*, Shakyamuni Buddha told the congregation, “To benefit all sentient beings, Guanyin Bodhisattva has a thousand arms and just as many eyes.” The Buddha then detailed the immeasurable superior merits of the Guanyin Bodhisattva. Upon hearing this, Venerable Ananda was perplexed by such immense merits of the Bodhisattva, prompting the Buddha to explain:

I remember a time in the past when Guanyin Bodhisattva had attained Buddhahood prior to me, known as “True Dharma Brightness Tathagata” and has all ten honorable titles of Buddha. At that time, I was an ascetic disciple under that Buddha, learning from his teachings, and now

I have achieved Buddhahood. All Tathagatas of the ten directions have achieved the supreme path in their marvelous land and turned the Wheel of the Dharma because of the teachings of Guanyin. Hence, you should not doubt Guanyin's merits and should always make offerings.

This account reveals that Guanyin Bodhisattva has attained Buddhahood long ago, known as "The Tathagata who Clearly Understands the True Law." He was once Shakyamuni Buddha's teacher, and it was under his tutelage that Shakyamuni Buddha set out on his journey to enlightenment. Moreover, all Tathagatas of the ten directions owe their ability to realize and preach the Dharma to Guanyin's profound teachings.

3. The Account in the *Compassionate Lotus Sutra*

As written in the *Compassionate Lotus Sutra*, immeasurable kalpas ago, Amitabha Buddha was a Chakravartin Wheel-Turning Monarch, renowned in prestige and wielding vast influence. His prince, named Bu

Xuan (meaning Not Deluded), was none other than Guanyin Bodhisattva. At that time, there was a Buddha named Treasure Tathagata, who preached the Dharma to the Chakravartin Wheel-Turning Monarch and his crown prince, and bestowed upon them prophecies. Prince Bu Xuan, standing before Treasure Tathagata, vowed:

Now, with my great and righteous voice, I formally announce to all sentient beings that I transfer all my virtuous roots to Anuttara-samyak-sambodhi (the highest perfect awakening). As I walk the bodhisattva path, should there be sentient beings experiencing anguish, fear, or similar circumstances; should they stray from the true Dharma, thus falling into great confusion and suffering, being beset by worry, loneliness, and deprivation, lacking rescue or refuge; if they remember me or invoke my name, and if they are heard or seen by my divine ear or eye, and if these sentient beings cannot be liberated from their suffering, then I will never attain Anuttara-samyak-sambodhi.

Treasure Tathagata also gave a prophecy to Prince Bu Xuan, saying:

You observe devas, humans, and all beings in the Three Evil Paths, cultivating great compassion with the desire to cut off all their suffering, to sever all their afflictions, and to make all beings dwell in peace and happiness. Virtuous man! I shall now name you Avalokitesvara (Guanyin)... After Amitabha Buddha enters nirvana, in the latter part of the second asamkhyeya kalpa that follows; during the initial division of the night, the true Dharma shall be completely extinguished. In the subsequent division of that same night, that land will be renamed as the “World-Accomplished-with-All-Jewels.” This world, resplendent with various supreme embellishments and boundless tranquility and bliss, will surpass the preceding world.

Amitabha Buddha, Guanyin Bodhisattva, and Mahasthamaprapta Bodhisattva are currently the Three Saints of the Pure Land. In the future, after Amitabha Buddha enters nirvana, Guanyin Bodhisattva will succeed him,

and the Pure Land will be even more splendid than it is now. Such is the profound karmic connection between Guanyin Bodhisattva and Amitabha Buddha.

This concludes a succinct overview of Guanyin Bodhisattva's origin as found in the Buddhist canons.

II

GUANYIN BODHISATTVA'S SACRED NAME

Guanyin Bodhisattva, also known as Guanshiyin Bodhisattva, bears a title intimately linked to achieving Perfect Realization Based on the Auditory Faculty.

The *Surangama Sutra* documents Guanyin's method of achieving Perfect Realization Based on the Auditory Faculty: "First, I redirected my hearing inward to dissolve into the nature of hearing, then the external sounds disappeared. After the sounds disappeared, I could see clearly the arising and disappearing of both sounds and thoughts with a detached mind." This technique

regarding the act of listening is primarily used for individual cultivation: “Merely turn your hearing around, to listen to your genuine true nature, which is the destination of the Path that is supreme.” I will elaborate on this later during the lecture.

The *Lotus Sutra’s Universal Gate of Guanyin Bodhisattva*, on a different note, primarily focuses on two aspects of Guanyin Bodhisattva. First, it describes how Guanyin Bodhisattva takes on different forms to compassionately liberate sentient beings, as “The Universal Gate is limitless, and Great Compassion pervades all.” Second, it elucidates Guanyin Bodhisattva’s commitment to hearing and aiding anyone who calls for help. So long as sentient beings undergoing hardship invoke Guanyin Bodhisattva’s name, they will be rescued, as the text says, “Good men, if there are countless hundreds of millions of billions of living beings, experiencing all manner of suffering, who hear of Guanyin Bodhisattva and call his name with single-minded effort, then Guanyin Bodhisattva will instantly observe the sound of their cries, and they

will all be liberated.”

Thus, the name of Guanyin represents the dual objectives of benefiting oneself and benefiting others. The practice of Perfect Realization Based on the Auditory Faculty is primarily about benefiting oneself, while responding to the cries of suffering beings leans towards benefiting others. These two objectives define the journey of a bodhisattva. Considering the vast amount of suffering in our world, it is no wonder Guanyin Bodhisattva is held in high esteem.

III

GUANYIN BODHISATTVA'S DHARMA GATE

The term “Guanyin’s Dharma Gate” is now often misused. Many folk religions, pseudo-Buddhist sects, and even cult organizations, recognizing the credibility and market appeal of the name “Guanyin,” have been fraudulently using this label for their own gain. This is something we must be especially vigilant against and discerning towards. So, what is the true “Guanyin’s Dharma Gate”? Here, based on different scriptures, I will briefly introduce a few variations for everyone.

1. Guanyin's Dharma Gate in the *Heart Sutra*

The goal of Buddhist practice is very clear: to perfect the qualities of Buddhas and bodhisattvas within ourselves. Before the practice, our character and life qualities are rooted in delusion, with greed, anger, and ignorance as the core traits. This reality makes us ordinary beings, awash with confusion, and bound to perpetually create afflictions, experience suffering, and endure the cycle of rebirth. Unless we change our state of being, life has no hope. Because greed, anger, and ignorance have no end, so do afflictions, suffering, and the cycle of rebirth.

When we truly grasp the perils of our current existence and aspire for the liberation and ease of Buddhas and bodhisattvas, it becomes essential to make fundamental changes to our lives. Studying Buddhism provides a path for us to transform from ordinary beings into saints. Transforming from ordinary means changing the life quality of ordinary beings, and becoming saints means achieving the life quality of Buddhas and bodhisattvas, which is enlightenment and liberation. Although

Buddhas and ordinary beings seem worlds apart, the initial distinction is only a single thought of either delusion or enlightenment. With delusion, we remain ordinary beings; once enlightened, we become Buddhas. Yet, this wisdom alone is certainly not sufficient, as we must further perfect our great loving-kindness and compassion to attain true Buddhahood. Overall, the life of an ordinary being evolves from ignorance, which generates a system of delusion and forms the character of the ordinary being. Understanding this principle gives us a clear idea of what we need to focus on in our practice.

In the *Heart Sutra*, “Guanyin” is rendered in Chinese by Xuanzang as “Guanzizai.” The opening line is:

Guanzizai Bodhisattva, when practicing deeply the Prajna Paramita, perceives that all five aggregates are empty and is liberated from all suffering and distress.

Kumarajiva of Yao Qin Dynasty translated Guanyin as “Guanshiyin,” while Xuanzang of Tang Dynasty

translated it as “Guanzizai.” These two individuals both hold a prominent place in the annals of Chinese Buddhist translation. Kumarajiva was known for his fluid translations that were not only clear but also poetically resonant; Xuanzang, on the other hand, favored literal translations, striving to remain as true as possible to the original text.

How do bodhisattvas experience such freedom (Zizai)? The key lies in the practice of “observation,” or “Vipashyana,” which means observing with wisdom. When we use wisdom to observe everything inside and outside our bodies and minds, we can liberate ourselves from all restraints, thereby achieving absolute freedom. But, how can we hone the skill of observation? This question takes us to the teachings of prajna (wisdom), which highlights three forms of wisdom: learned prajna, reflective prajna, and cultivational prajna (prajna gained by direct experience).

To learn Buddhism, one must first attain right views by

listening to and contemplating the teachings. This process fosters the first type of wisdom: learned prajna. Ordinary people, veiled by delusion, cannot perceive their bodies, minds, and the surrounding world with clarity. Consequently, they mistakenly associate temporary aspects like social status, position, and physical appearance as their “self,” which leads to the rise of greed, anger and ignorance, along with a myriad of incorrect views, emotional distress, and afflictions. With such flawed views, they perceive the world not in its authentic form, but through a distorted lens crafted by their misconceptions. However, they often hold onto these false ideas, believing that what they see is the ultimate reality. These tendencies are referred to in Buddhism as attachment to the self and attachment to phenomena. These ubiquitous attachments known as *parikalpita*, existing everywhere and at all times, are the fundamental source of all afflictions. These afflictions in turn lead to negative karma, trapping us in the cycle of rebirth. This is how the system of delusion unfolds in our lives.

Buddhism emphasizes on seeing things as they truly are. It guides us towards rectifying our misconceptions and accurately perceiving ourselves, the world, and the true essence of life and the universe. In this sense, practicing Buddhist teachings fundamentally revolves around acquiring right views and cultivating wisdom. Although there are three main Buddhist traditions – Mahayana, Theravada, and Vajrayana – each with numerous sub-sects, their core teachings are the same: impermanence, no-self, consciousness-only, dependent-origination, empty of intrinsic nature, and the inherent Buddha-nature in all sentient beings. By actively listening and reflecting on these teachings, we will obtain these learned wisdoms, which guide us in accurately observing everything inside and outside our bodies and minds. More importantly, we should embrace and apply this newfound understanding, replace our entrenched misconceptions, and employ this wisdom to reflect upon life and tackle its challenges.

Then, to transform learned prajna into reflective prajna, we must have a foundation in samatha, or concentration.

Samatha refers to the sustained and stable focus we aim to develop through meditation. During meditation, we can select an anchor such as the Buddha's image, his name, or our breath and continuously train our mind to focus on it. As distracting thoughts gradually subside, a clear awareness will arise in our mind. Furthermore, using this awareness to observe every action and thought, we will realize that the physical body is merely a provisional synthesis of form, feeling, perception, mental formation, and consciousness, where no inherent "self" can be found. Meanwhile, we will recognize that thoughts are constantly changing and that all sensations ultimately lead to suffering. This is reflective prajna, observing everything without emotionally attaching to anything. As our observational skill grows, greed, anger, and delusion will lose their support and gradually melt away, leading to increasing freedom and ease in life.

It was precisely through observation that the Guanyin Bodhisattva perceived the emptiness of the five aggregates (form, feeling, perception, mental formation, and

consciousness). However, his observation was not an ordinary one; it was deep prajna paramita. While ordinary people also meditate and cultivate observational skills, they are only observing at the conscious level, not practicing deep prajna paramita. Only by transcending consciousness can we enter the realm of cultivational prajna, or deep prajna paramita.

Indeed, with reflective prajna, we too can discern the emptiness of the five aggregates. However, this recognition of emptiness is not thorough. It represents an understanding limited to the realm of conventional truth, which merely acknowledges that all phenomena are dependently-originated, illusory, and lacking an intrinsic nature. By entering deep prajna paramita, however, we can directly perceive the emptiness of the five aggregates. Then, by residing in this state of emptiness, we free ourselves from all suffering. This is Guanyin Bodhisattva's method of cultivation.

We may not be at Guanyin Bodhisattva's stage, and deep

prajna paramita may be beyond us now, but we can start by practicing reflective prajna. With persistent effort in this direction, and as our reflective prajna grows stronger, we will definitely experience more and more tranquility, and eventually achieve a life of perfect liberation and ease. As stated in the *Heart Sutra*, “Away from delusive thinking, they ultimately attain nirvana.” The “Guanzizai Meditation Camp” at Xiyuan Temple holds true to this principle, prioritizing the training of reflective prajna. The program begins with introspection and gradually progresses towards Chan (Zen) meditation. This approach is accessible to beginners but has great depth, making it a clear, sequenced, and effective method.

2. The Practice of Perfect Realization Based on the Auditory Faculty in the *Surangama Sutra*

The practice of Perfect Realization Based on the Auditory Faculty, which is rooted in the principle of Tathagarbha, has a very high starting point and aims directly at our innate nature. This is why Chan masters

throughout history have held this method in high esteem.

There are two systems within our lives. The ordinary person dwells within the system of delusion and unenlightenment. Yet the Buddha, upon his enlightenment, saw that all sentient beings have the inherent potential to become awakened, although this potential often remains concealed. Recognizing this, Buddhist cultivation has been divided into two methods: sudden awakening (suddenism) and gradual practice (gradualism). The method of sudden awakening guides practitioners to directly discern life's inherent awakened nature, leaping straight into the realm of the Tathagata. Gradual practice, to the contrary, targets the system of delusion, helping practitioners understand and dismantle each delusion, piece by piece. As it gradually washes away the inner impurities, practitioners would steadily approach and ultimately realize their awakened nature. These two methods cater to practitioners with sharp and dull faculties, respectively. Indeed, the Buddha imparted 84,000 Dharma methods,

aimed at guiding different individuals in the most suitable way for each of them, adapting the teachings to the aptitude of the students.

So, what distinguishes those with sharp faculties from those with dull faculties? It all comes down to the amount of impurities within one's mind. Individuals with sharp faculties have a thin veil of mental impurity that can be pierced with a single insight, making them receptive to teachings that directly target their original nature. Conversely, those with dull faculties have a thick shell of mental impurities, making them impervious to profound teachings. Hence, they must begin with fundamental practices to build a solid foundation. But remember, faculties are not innate, but represent life's accumulations. Even if your faculties are dull, with the right method and gradual practice, you can still purify your mind. Master Shen Xiu's words ring true, "The body is a bodhi tree; the mind is like a standing mirror. Always try to keep them clean, so that no dust remains." Through constant effort in clearing away mental impurities,

anyone can unveil their awakened nature.

The practice of Perfect Realization Based on the Auditory Faculty pertains to sudden awakening, not gradual practice. In the sixth volume of the *Surangama Sutra*, 25 bodhisattvas shared their cultivation experiences in past lives. Mahasthamaprapta Bodhisattva, for instance, outlined his practice of chanting the Buddha's name. His method – from reciting the Buddha's name, recalling the Buddha's presence, calming the six sense faculties, to continuous chanting with a pure mind – has exerted a significant influence on the Pure Land Sect. Guanyin Bodhisattva, on the other hand, introduced the practice of Perfect Realization Based on the Auditory Faculty, which greatly influenced Chan Buddhism. The relevant verses are quite profound, and I will provide a brief introduction after:

At that time, a Buddha appeared in the world by the name of Guanyin Buddha. Before this Buddha, I made the resolution to cultivate bodhicitta, and he instructed me

to realize samadhi through the practice of hearing, contemplating, and practicing. First, I redirected my hearing inward to dissolve into the nature of hearing, then the external sounds disappeared. After the sounds disappeared, I could see clearly the arising and disappearing of both sounds and thoughts with a detached mind. As I gradually progressed, the consciousness that hears and the sounds that are heard vanished in the contemplation through the hearing nature. After the consciousness that hears and the sounds that are heard vanished, my mind became non-abiding. Furthermore, I realized that my awareness and the objects of my awareness were empty in nature. After I had perfectly realized that my awareness and the objects of my awareness were empty, such emptiness and the objects of emptiness became empty as well. When the delusional mind of arising and ceasing was completely empty in nature, the true mind of ultimate nirvana fully emerged. My awakened nature fully manifested, transcending both this world and the realm beyond this world, illuminating the worlds of ten directions with complete brightness. I realized two supreme powers. The

first was that I attained the same inherent and wondrous true mind with all Buddhas of the ten directions, sharing the same power of loving-kindness. The second was that I attained the same power of compassion for all sentient beings of the ten directions in the six realms.

First, we are told about a Buddha in the past, known as “Guanyin Buddha.” Guanyin Bodhisattva, during his path to enlightenment, once practiced under this ancient Buddha. In the presence of this Buddha, Guanyin gave rise to bodhicitta, the wish to attain Buddhahood for the benefit of all beings. Guanyin Buddha then guided Guanyin Bodhisattva to embark on the path of liberation “to realize samadhi through the practice of hearing, contemplating, and practicing.” This method is standard in Buddhist practice. All Buddhist practitioners strive towards three types of wisdom: the wisdom from hearing the Dharma, the wisdom from contemplating the Dharma, and the wisdom from following and practicing the Dharma. Thus, at first glance, Guanyin Bodhisattva’s cultivation method may seem like the norm.

What makes this sutra extraordinary is how it interprets the techniques of hearing, contemplating, and practicing. First, how do we “hear”? As you hear my voice right now, your mind tunes to the sound. Similar things occur with all the sounds we hear every day. When we hear, our minds gravitate towards the sound, giving rise to various fantasies and distinctions. This is consciousness at work. Now, let us look at how the Guanyin Buddha instructed Guanyin Bodhisattva on hearing.

“First, I redirected my hearing inward to dissolve into the nature of hearing, then the external sounds disappeared.” Entering the “nature of hearing” means going against the typical direction of hearing. When someone hears a sound, their mind instinctively reaches outward to identify the sound and make assumptions based on it. In contrast, going against the typical direction of hearing means hearing inward, asking who is hearing the sound and what is the nature that can hear. By examining the function of hearing, we can return to the nature of hearing. In fact, “hearing” comprises two aspects:

the consciousness of hearing and the nature of hearing. When our minds latch onto sounds, generating all sorts of distinctions, we are using the consciousness of hearing. However, it is important to understand that the root of this consciousness is the nature of hearing. The consciousness of hearing is a function of the awakened nature; the nature of hearing is a manifestation of the awakened nature. Therefore, when the awakened nature manifests in hearing, it becomes the nature of hearing. When it manifests in seeing, it becomes the nature of seeing. Essentially, the goal of Chan practice is to directly reveal this awakened nature.

The consciousness of hearing ebbs and flows with the sounds that we perceive. For example, when we hear a sound, a corresponding consciousness arises; and when the sound fades, that consciousness dissolves. However, whether there is sound or not, whether we can hear it or not, the nature of hearing and the hearing function are still present. Because otherwise, how would we recognize silence? Similarly, the function of seeing has allowed us

to recognize many people in this dignified lecture hall. But when we close our eyes, does the function of seeing persist? Yes, it does, only now it reveals total darkness. If the function of seeing disappears when we close our eyes, how could we recognize the darkness? Since we can still perceive darkness, the function of seeing must be operational. To summarize, the ability to distinguish is a function of consciousness, but the root of consciousness is our awakened nature. The sutra writes, “First, I redirected my hearing inward to dissolve into the nature of hearing, then the external sounds disappeared.” “Entering the nature of hearing” refers to realizing the hearing’s nature. Upon realizing such an awakened nature, our attachment to external sounds will diminish. As we return to the nature of hearing, all sounds become less distinct, even go unnoticed altogether. And, even when sounds are present around us, they become mere reflections that can barely affect us.

“After the sounds disappeared, I could see clearly the arising and disappearing of both sounds and thoughts with

a detached mind.” As long as we do not succumb to our attachment to sounds, our minds can return to the hearing’s nature, our awakened nature. This allows us to perceive all things clearly, whether our thoughts or the external world are active or still. When sounds emerge, we hear them, and give rise to thoughts – we understand that our mind is in an active state. When there is no sound, our mind is in a state of tranquility – we understand that our mind is at rest. Regardless of our mind’s condition, we perceive it with clarity without fixating on anything in particular. As we remain grounded in the awakened nature, our mind remains unattached, no matter what arises.

“As I gradually progressed, the consciousness that hears and the sounds that are heard vanished in the contemplation through the hearing nature.” Since we have never revealed the nature of hearing before, we must now persistently familiarize ourselves with it through meditation. Every time a sound arises, we should ask ourselves – Who am I? Who is the one that can hear the sound?

Through this continuous questioning, our nature of hearing strengthens. Meanwhile, both the delusive consciousness that hears and the sounds that are heard will gradually dissolve under the observation of our nature of hearing. As such, the disturbances caused by the consciousness of hearing and sounds themselves lessen, making our minds increasingly empty, calm, and pure. The extent of this emptiness and purity depends on the power of our nature of hearing.

“After the consciousness that hears and the sounds that are heard vanished, my mind became non-abiding. Furthermore, I realized that my awareness and the objects of my awareness were empty in nature.” We have recognized that our consciousness of hearing and the objects it perceives are gradually dissolving. This is due to the inherent power of awareness within us. However, this type of awareness is not ultimate, so we need to progress to the next step – the state the Guanyin Bodhisattva described as “my awareness and the objects of my awareness were empty in nature.” If there is still awareness, it means that

we are still consciously performing reflective prajna which is still a transitional phase. So we must not stop here. We need to transition from discriminative to non-discriminative observation in order to truly tap into the awakened nature. Yet, how can we return to the awakened nature from awareness itself? The answer is to empty our awareness as well, so that we neither dwell on the awareness nor on the objects of the awareness.

“After I had perfectly realized that my awareness and the objects of my awareness were empty, such emptiness and the objects of emptiness became empty as well.” When we have emptied both our awareness and its objects, is there still something we call emptiness? If such emptiness persists, it means we have not achieved the ultimate truth but rather ended up in “imbalanced emptiness.” And, this emptiness must also be emptied. The thoughtless mind we strive to attain is non-abiding and devoid of form. It neither settles in emptiness nor in existence, neither in motion nor in stillness. It surpasses all forms, illuminating without attachment. Only through this can we

understand our mind's essence, its non-duality of emptiness and awareness. The *Platform Sutra* tells us that the awakened nature consists of nature and function: it is empty in nature, yet infinitely useful in function. Clinging to emptiness can strip it of its marvelous uses. Within the context of Buddhist practice, attaching to emptiness can be more disastrous than attaching to intrinsic existence. As per the *Madhyamika Shastra*, "The Buddha taught the Dharma of emptiness to liberate beings from false views. But if one instead clings to the view of emptiness itself, they are considered beyond the Buddhas' remedy." The Buddha imparts the Dharma of emptiness to free us from attachment to intrinsic existence. If this instead makes us cling to emptiness, dismiss causality, and adopt an indifferent attitude towards everything, then even the Buddhas would not be able to help you.

"When the delusional mind of arising and ceasing was completely empty in nature, the true mind of ultimate nirvana fully emerged." This is the most important part. Our attachments to existence and emptiness, motion and

stillness, are all facets of the ordinary mind, a mind of arising and ceasing. Now, we must dispel all forms of attachments, whether it is to emptiness, existence, motion, stillness, the mundane, the sacred, the attainment of Buddhahood, or the deliverance of all beings. The existence of any attachment can be a foundation for the ordinary mind. Once the ordinary mind gains a foothold, it obstructs our attainment of the awakened nature. Hence, all such footholds need to be removed, just like the Chan proverb, “If Buddha appears, kill the Buddha. If demons appear, kill the demons.” Only then can ceasing and arising end, revealing the ultimate nirvana. The concept of ceasing and arising refers to the mind of ceasing and arising; only when this deluded mind is completely swept away can the true mind of ultimate nirvana fully emerge.

“My awakened nature fully manifested, transcending both this world and the realm beyond this world, illuminating the worlds of ten directions with complete brightness.” When the awakened nature is fully revealed, it transcends both the worldly and the otherworldly.

Like the void, it pervades all ten directions, illuminating brightly and perfectly complete.

“I realized two supreme powers. The first was that I attained the same inherent and wondrous true mind with all Buddhas of the ten directions, sharing the same power of loving-kindness. The second was that I attained the same power of compassion for all sentient beings of the ten directions in the six realms.” We can acquire two remarkable powers. The first is to realize the same awakened nature as the Buddhas of the ten directions and experience the same great loving-kindness and compassion that these Buddhas possess. The second is to achieve oneness with all Buddhas of the ten directions and all sentient beings in the six realms. This allows us to breathe in unison with the Buddhas and resonate deeply with all sentient beings, fostering a compassion for them as though they were extensions of our own bodies. The division that exists between us and other sentient beings is due to the loss of such unity, which makes us misunderstand our own identities and form self-attachment. This self-attachment

is the root of many conflicts, including those among nations, regions, and ethnic groups.

The practice of Perfect Realization Based on the Auditory Faculty in the *Surangama Sutra* is truly wondrous and supreme. Now that you have listened to it once, the wholesome root for the Dharma Gate of sudden awakening has been planted within your heart.

3. The Practice of All-Encompassing Great Compassion in the *Lotus Sutra's Universal Gate of Guanyin Bodhisattva*

The *Universal Gate of Guanyin Bodhisattva* comes from the *Lotus Sutra*, and it details Guanyin Bodhisattva's teachings, which can be summarized as: "The Universal Gate is limitless, and great compassion pervades all." The term "Universal" means all-encompassing. Guanyin Bodhisattva's great compassion is limitless, boundless, extending to all sentient beings equally, without distinction. This means that such great compassion is

quantifiable: if there exists a single being that the Bodhisattva is reluctant to show compassion towards, then he has yet to achieve the complete and perfect great compassion. Obviously, we do not have the chance to interact with all sentient beings. Still, the key question remains, for all those we do encounter, are we able to accept them, sympathize with them, understand them, and assist them unconditionally?

This kind of compassion must be tested in our day-to-day experiences, in every situation, and with every person we come across. By continuously evaluating and refining our compassion, its strength grows. Eventually, our compassion will enable us to engage with more people, even those we once disliked. Such is the process of nurturing and achieving a compassionate mind.

In Buddhist scriptures, great loving-kindness and compassion are portrayed as the thousand hands and eyes of Guanyin Bodhisattva. His thousand eyes represent infinite wisdom, and his thousand arms signify infinite

compassion. The Bodhisattva, in his efforts to benefit all sentient beings, found ordinary eyes and arms insufficient, thus manifesting a thousand of each. This is an emblem of his vow of compassion. Within the *Universal Gate Chapter on Guanyin Bodhisattva*, great loving-kindness and compassion are expressed through his thirty-two forms: “If there are people who must be liberated in a certain way, then Guanyin Bodhisattva will manifest according to that need and teach them the Dharma.”

More often than not, we cannot distinguish who Guanyin Bodhisattva is, as a true bodhisattva does not wear a label saying “I am Guanyin.” So, what distinguishes Guanyin Bodhisattva? The couplet by Master Taixu in the Hall of Guanyin at the South Putuo Temple provides a clue, “With purity of heart, every place becomes Putuo; with compassion towards all, one becomes Guanyin.” This suggests that anyone who embodies the compassionate qualities of Guanyin is the Bodhisattva himself.

What does it mean to embody Guanyin’s compassionate

qualities? It extends beyond ordinary compassion, encompassing both “great unconditional loving-kindness” and “great compassion of sameness.” “Unconditional” means that there are no requirements or preconditions, and “sameness” means viewing all sentient beings and oneself as a single entity. This sense of sameness is not a visualization exercise but Guanyin’s actual state of being. As he has attained the state of unity with all sentient beings across the six realms, this form of compassion naturally ensues. When an itchy or painful spot appears on our body, our hand immediately helps to soothe it without thinking whether it should or what benefit to expect. This is what compassion of sameness looks like – an instinctive reaction. Guanyin shows compassion towards sentient beings in the same way; by fully uniting himself with all beings, he perceives their suffering as his own and their needs as his needs.

Each of us carries some measure of compassionate qualities in our lives. As Mencius once said, “All people have a heart that feels for others.” Yet, frequently, this sentiment

is rather faint. To expand this limited compassion into something boundless, to cultivate the “great compassion of sameness” that is equal, infinite, no-self, and no-obtain for all beings, requires substantial effort. It begins with giving rise to bodhicitta, which establishes a noble altruistic aspiration to benefit all beings and alleviate their suffering as our personal mission. The next step is performing meditations on emptiness to dispel the barriers between self and others. Only then, can we nurture the mind of equality and no-obtain, elevating conventional bodhicitta to ultimate bodhicitta.

Therefore, Guanyin’s great loving-kindness and compassion are not the conventional feeling of love, which is often limited and laden with biases. Instead, his compassion is boundless, impartial, and surpasses any sort of distinction. It is this profound compassion that enables him to hear and respond to cries of suffering, providing relief from all disasters. As written in the *Universal Gate of Guanyin Bodhisattva*, if “sentient beings who suffer a myriad of afflictions heard of Guanyin Bodhisattva and

single-mindedly recited his name, the Bodhisattva would immediately perceive their calls and deliver them from their suffering. If someone maintained the recitation of the name Guanyin Bodhisattva and encountered a great fire, he would not be burned because of the Bodhisattva's extraordinary powers. If one were washed away by a great billow of water and recited the name of this Bodhisattva, he would soon find himself in shallow waters..."

One might ask, how does Guanyin Bodhisattva wield such immense power? How does he alleviate the suffering of sentient beings, resolving their many afflictions and troubles? The key is his great compassion. Reciting the name of Guanyin is to invoke it; practicing Guanyin's methods is to cultivate it; and becoming Guanyin is to fully perfect it. It is built upon the truth of emptiness, which inherently has the power to eliminate all forms of suffering. As a result, within the embrace of great compassion, conflict, hatred, and disaster dissolve. This is the secret weapon of Guanyin Bodhisattva and an invaluable treasure in our lives. Once we attain great compassion, we not

only possess the power to alleviate our own suffering but also hold the capacity to relieve all beings of their distress. This is the way to truly “fill the world with love.” Moreover, great compassion does not merely dispel disaster, it also helps us accumulate boundless merits, thus ensuring all our wishes are fulfilled. It is fair to say that great compassion is the greatest field of merit. As we cultivate great compassion, we sow seeds into this fertile soil.

Central to Mahayana Buddhism are the tenets of bodhicitta and great compassion, but regrettably, these elements are often neglected by us. Why do many Buddhists come off as indifferent or pessimistic? It is because we have fallen short of practicing the core tenets of Mahayana Buddhism and failed to establish a deep connection with the fate of all sentient beings, as the Buddhas and bodhisattvas have done. Recognizing this, I have been promoting the cultivation of bodhicitta and urging adherence to the aspirational bodhicitta precepts since 2003. My hope is for all of us to genuinely understand and put into practice the true spirit of Mahayana Buddhism.

The three cultivation methods I have introduced are from the *Heart Sutra*, the *Surangama Sutra*, and the *Lotus Sutra*. These are Guanyin's authentic Dharma teachings. In society today, there are many counterfeit products, and even Buddhism has been exploited by those with ulterior motives, resulting in the emergence of various fake Buddhist sects. I hope that everyone can establish the right view, so they can discern the right from the wrong.

IV

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF CHANTING GUANYIN'S SACRED NAME

As Buddhist practitioners, when we chant Guanyin's sacred name and practice his teachings, it is not about seeking blessings or fulfilling personal desires. Instead, there are three significant objectives we should aim to achieve.

First, chanting Guanyin's name strengthens our power of observation. This helps us in developing reflective prajna, which ultimately leads us to attain cultivational prajna, and achieve a life of true liberation and ease.

Second, by reciting Guanyin's name, we are practicing the

Perfect Realization Based on the Auditory Faculty. Rather than fixating on the external world, we turn our focus inward and listen to our inherent nature by questioning: Who is it that hears? What gives rise to the consciousness of hearing? Just as in the Chan school, where practitioners pursue the query “Who is it that recites the Buddha’s name?,” we should also introspect to unearth the source within the stream of sound. The Buddha, under the bodhi tree, fully realized the twelvefold chain of dependent origination by contemplating it in reverse, moving from aging and death to birth, further to existence, clinging, craving, and finally, ignorance, the ultimate source of samsara. Guanyin’s method operates in a similar vein, tracing the source from sound to the consciousness of hearing, then from the arising of this consciousness to further search for the nature of hearing and the nature of awakening.

Third, chanting Guanyin’s name is a means of invoking and cultivating great compassion. Rather than praying merely for blessings, we should aspire to learn from

Guanyin, striving to become his messengers and serve as his eyes and hands to help this world. If a person's focus is solely on praying for blessings, it indicates a sense of lack in their life. Learning to be a bodhisattva, on the other hand, means offering assistance to all sentient beings. The wealthiest person is one who can give freely and does not feel the need for anything in their life. After all, our lives inherently possess infinite treasures; the key is to recognize and claim these treasures.

On this auspicious day, we have gained insight into Guanyin Bodhisattva and his teachings, a most fitting way of honoring him. However, merely listening is not enough – we must thoughtfully digest what is learned today, and moreover, start to regard Guanyin as our role model, cultivate great compassion, realize our awakened nature, and strive to embody his characteristics as soon as we can.