



The Infinite Life Sutra: The Larger Sukhavativyuha Sutra

Gautama Buddha

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The Infinite Life Sutra is a Mahayana Buddhist sutra, and the primary text of Pure Land Buddhism. It is the longest of the three major texts of Pure Land Buddhism. In the Longer Sukhavativyuha Sutra, the Buddha begins by describing to his attendant Ananda a past life of the Buddha, Amitabha. He states that in a past life, Amitabha was once king who renounced his kingdom, and became a bodhisattva monk named Dharmakara ("Dharma Storehouse"). Under the guidance of the buddha Lokeshvararaja ("World Sovereign King"), innumerable buddha-lands throughout the ten directions were revealed to him. After meditating for five eons as a bodhisattva, he then made a great series of vows to save all sentient beings, and through his great merit, created the realm of Sukhavati ("Ultimate Bliss"). This land of Sukhavati would later come to be known as the Pure Land. The sutra describes in great detail Sukhavati and its inhabitants, and how they are able to attain rebirth there. The text also provides a detailed account of the various levels and beings in the Mahayana Buddhist cosmology. The sutra also contains the forty-eight vows of Amitabha Buddha to save all sentient beings. The eighteenth vow is among the most important as it forms a basic tenet of the Pure Land school. This vow is most commonly known as shi nian bi sheng yuan, because it states that if a sentient being makes even "ten recitations" of the Amitabha Buddha's name they will attain "certain rebirth" into the Pure Land.

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